

# JEEVADHARA

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LET JESUS GOSPEL US

THE RELEVANCE OF EVANGELIZATION

*Bosco Puthur*

THE ACHIEVEMENT AND SIGNIFICANCE OF PUEBLA

*John B. Chethimattam*

EVANGELIZATION, TRUTH AND MANIPULATION

*Samuel Rayan*

ECUMENISM AND FREEDOM

*Sebastian Kappen*

BULLETIN :

1. A LETTER AND SOME COMMENTS
2. STATEMENT OF THEOLOGIANS AT THE I. T. A. MEETING

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# JEEVADHARA

## The Living Christ

**LET JESUS GOSPEL US**

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## CONTENTS

	<i>Pages</i>
Editorial	173
The Relevance of Evangelization <i>Bosco Puthur</i>	175
The Achievement and Significance of Puebla <i>John B. Chethimattam</i>	184
Evangelization, Truth and Manipulation <i>Samuel Rayan</i>	200
Ecumenism and Freedom <i>Sebastian Kappen</i>	217
Bulletin: A Letter and some Comments	231



# Editorial

What is Jesus doing now? asked a novice. Loving you, it's a full time job, came the ready reply. Jesus is always with us, right within the turmoil of our history. He is with us in the thick of our struggle, sustaining us with the good news of liberation and the hope of human completion. He gospels our lives, agonies and achievements. He loves and lives in our midst evangelizing.

This issue of *Jeevadhara* meditates on certain aspects and implications of Jesus' love for us and life among us as the Proclaimed Word of Salvation.

Bosco Puthur looks at Jesus as God's mission and missionary. Evangelization can be truly understood only in terms of Jesus. Evangelization in India has to keep asking what it means to confess Jesus as Lord and Saviour in India today. It has to be an expression of the experience of God that is in Christ Jesus; its source can only be an experience-based interpretation of Jesus in relation to the life and quest of the men and women of our land and our day.

One of the great events of recent times has been the world-wide discussion on evangelization provoked by the third general meeting of the conference of Latin American Bishops in Puebla, Mexico, in January-February, 1979. Debate started when the meet was in preparation, raged when it was in session and continued after the publication of its documents. We give here two studies on this event which made Jesus' presence among us so very tangible. John B. Chethimattam's account of the event culminates in a word about its significance. Puebla shows "what it means to follow Jesus in Latin America today" or, for that matter, anywhere else on our earth where the immense masses of the exploited and the deprived are beginning to take hold of history and to fight back with or without support from traditional religions and religious leaders. The second study on Puebla by Samuel Rayan illustrates the presence of Jesus as Truth in the

struggles for human dignity and liberation. Truth and justice go together. Both may suffer at the hands of manipulators but finally both will break through the tombs they build over them. The meditation shows how class interests and institutionalism can distort our vision, our loyalty and sense of values. We stand forewarned. We also stand encouraged to confident action on the side of the truth of people. Their truth will win, though it be through the experience of the cross. But manipulation is no Gospel; it saves nobody, even when it has ecclesiastical patronage.

Jesus is the symbol of truth. He is also the flag of freedom. He is the voice of truth and the wind of liberty. Freedom goes with fellowship. Sebastian Kappen explores the relation between fellowship (unity, ecumenism) and freedom . . . two vital concerns of Jesus for our world and our land. To be united as God's family is to enjoy the freedom of the children of God and gift freedom to one another and defend it together. Fellowship is an act of freedom and a bond among the free and the equal. Kappen exposes the contradictions inherent in ideas of dialogue and ecumenism from positions of power and domination. Jesus is greater than all the churches and religions; the Father is greater than Jesus; and God is greater than our heart. All religious and secular traditions and achievements stand before him for judgement and salvation.

The last piece is a letter on evangelization written against the background of the reality of our country. We thought it important enough to be reproduced almost in its entirety and commented upon at some length. The letter shows how as history advances and the human reality grows in self-understanding and in complexity, the meaning and exigencies of evangelization change, and the presence and activity of Jesus in history is experienced differently. The Word goes on becoming Flesh, History, Earth ever more profoundly, inextricably, gladly. He goes on Good-Newsing us.



# The Relevance of Evangelization

Doubts and anxieties about the future mark the face of our times despite the astounding progress we have made in the sphere of technology and industry. Crises and conflicts have become features of the day the world over. From all sides comes the advice to be prepared to meet the "future shock". Christian life is not free from these conflicts and crises. The identity and uniqueness of Christian existence is being called in question. This is particularly obvious in the area of evangelization. After centuries of isolation, Christianity has become involved in the cross currents of the modern world. As a result there is among Christians all over the world a crisis of faith and of the proclamation of the faith.

This article is an attempt to deal briefly with the relevance of evangelization against the backdrop of the conflicts of the modern world. Evangelization was the theme of the Bishops' Synod held in Rome in 1974. In 1975 Paul VI published an apostolic exhortation titled *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (= EN), the Proclamation of the Gospel. In January-February 1979, the Latin American Bishop's meet at Puebla, Mexico, also chose to discuss the topic of "Evangelization in Latin America's Present and Future". These are evidences of the regard in which work of mission and evangelization is held by the Church.

## The message of Christ: liberation

"Go into the whole world and proclaim the good news to all creation" (Mk 16:15). This final message of Christ defines the purpose for which the Church exists as well as the basis of its continuity. Hence it is that every Church movement must spring from the spirit of mission (cf. AG 5).

The word mission comes from the latin word *missio* which means sending. Mission has its basis in the promises (*promissio*) of Christ. As Christ was sent to bear witness to the Father's infinite love and measureless mercy to humankind, so is the Church sent to witness to the promise of salvation to be accomp-

lished in God's kingdom. This point of view discloses best the Church's nature and growth.

In the history of the Old Testament we meet the prophets and other anointed servants of God. In these last days God sent his only Son into the world as its Saviour and the Herald of salvation (Hebrews 1:1-2; Jn 3:16). Christ is this missionary, sent to evangelize the world (Hb 3:1). It is therefore enough to look at Christ to grasp the deeper meaning of evangelization. Here is the Gospel passage in which Jesus himself indicates his mission and message:

"The spirit of the Lord is upon me; therefore he has anointed me.

He has sent me to bring good tidings to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives,

Recovery of sight to the blind and release to prisoners,

To announce a year of favour from the Lord". (Lk 4:18).

The Gospel mission is stated with clarity. It consists in announcing God's Word, in engaging in liberational activity, and in fostering the resulting fellowship of God's people. The task of Christians as individual persons and as groups is to lead to a foretaste of the kingdom of God those sections of the people who suffer physically, who are afflicted mentally, who hunger and thirst spiritually. There are three levels of missioning and evangelizing: they are the proclamation of the Word of God or *kerygma*; social action leading to liberation or *diakonia*; and nurturing of the community of love that participates in divine life in Christ Jesus or *koinonia*. It is through these that God's love and mercy for humankind is realized on earth. In the life and work of Christ these three currents met harmoniously in mutual complementarity. The excess of any one of them may perhaps distort the nature of the Christian Gospel.

The spirit of Christ should be in the disciples of Christ. "As the Father has sent me so I send you" (Jn 20:21). Mission calls for transformation. How this succession was realized in the disciples is indicated in the New Testament. The cowardly Peter was changed into a brave soldier of Christ. Paul, the persecutor of Christians, became Christ's renowned herald. Even a Samaritan prostitute is transformed into a missionary of Christ.



## The heart of the church

The reason why the Church exists is the proclamation of the salvation made possible in Christ. It is not so much that the Church has a mission as that the Church exists because there is a mission and a message. It is evangelization that determines the nature and character of the Church. The Church is to be a reflection of the message of Christ. A Church which does not strive to grow to the dimensions of the mission spirit will cease to be the Church of Christ. Church extension is not the leading purpose of evangelization. The leading purpose is to convey the salvation offered in Christ. The Church is nothing in itself. Its reality is to proclaim the Gospel to all peoples. As a document of the Second Vatican Council says, the people of God is sent into the world to be light to the world and salvation to those who do not believe (AG 5-6).

Essentially the Church is missionary. It is a pity that evangelization which is of the nature of the Church came later to be viewed merely as a means of Church extension. True, evangelization has greater relevance and importance among those who have not yet heard the Word of God, who have not experienced christian brotherhood and have not lived in the communion of love. But we must remember that it is not the only sphere of evangelization. The Gospel has to be announced afresh wherever life is not yet Christian.

## What is evangelization?

It is the announcing of the Gospel with a view to interior transformation. "For the Church, evangelization means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new" (EN, 18). By interior transformation Paul VI means the process of conversion which affects life permanently. "... if it had to be expressed in one sentence the best way of stating it would be to say that the Church evangelizes when she seeks to convert, solely through the divine power of the Message she proclaims, both the personal and the collective consciences of people, the activities in which they engage, and the lives and concrete milieu which are theirs" (EN, 18; cf. Rom 1:16; I Cor 2-4). The Gospel must bring about transformation in people. Its unique power must touch their hearts, and influence their lives.

Christ must become the centre and norm of man's decisions, value judgements, pursuit of interests and philosophy of life. A christian is one who accepts Christ as the supreme determinant and unquestioningly original model of his life<sup>1</sup>. To evangelize is to bring individual persons and human groups to this level and style of existence. Evangelization becomes fruitful only when we proclaim, through the witness of our lives, the truth that Jesus Christ is the centre of the cosmos and of human history.

### Some problems

The Bishops' Synod of 1974 discussed three vital problems: 1) what has happened in this age to the power of the Gospel to rouse the conscience of men? 2) what power and how much power does the Gospel message possess to transform the peoples of the present century? 3) what means should be adopted to make the power of the Gospel fruitful? It is necessary to find faithful, humble and bold solutions to these problems.

### Message and witness

If the Church in India, after two thousand years of evangelizing effort, has met with but meagre success, what should be the reasons? Our mission work was often confined to mere "announcement". Evangelization, basically and practically, must be carried out through the witness of Christian life. "... to evangelize is first of all to bear witness, in a simple and direct way, to God revealed by Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit; to bear witness that in his Son he has loved the world..." (EN, 26).

### Christ to become an experience

Many may ask sincerely: Who should live according to the spirit of Christ, the missionary preaching the Gospel or the common man of India listening to the Gospel? May be, through its organisational firmness and through the schools and other institutions it runs, the Church could teach the common man of our land a sort of western 'efficiency'. But could it, through

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1. H. Küng, *On Being a Christian*, London, Collins, 1978, p. 123.

these means, impart to them an experience of Jesus Christ? The people of our land give special credit to a contemplative style of life. But of the Christian religious living among them not one per cent belong to contemplative orders.<sup>2</sup> According to statistics, in 1969, only 5 percent of Indian clergy, and only one percent of the 30,000 women religious were engaged in actual mission work, while 45.8 per cent were in the field of education<sup>3</sup>. The intervening ten years do not seem to have witnessed any substantial change in this picture.

To those who are bold, imaginative and committed, India is such promising field for evangelization! But then we must be prepared to shed outdated activities and approaches! and realise that our task is not to be custodians of archaeological remnants. Is it not due to the adoption of a new style of action that Mother Theresa's Gospel work has proved so fruitful?

### Identity and relevance

What is the method and measure of the influence the Gospel message can exert to transform the people of our times. Two distinct poles of thought have appeared in modern Christian understanding of evangelization: for some, evangelization is work for the salvation of souls; for others it consists in social involvement for liberation for the betterment of human life. Christians thus find themselves in a critical situation composed of a crisis of identity and a crisis of relevance<sup>4</sup>. The Christian as he discovers his Christian identity experiences himself as alienated from and irrelevant to the modern world. On the other hand, the more relevant he strives to be in today's world, the more his christian identity tends to dim and disappear. This crisis and polarisation can be avoided only through a correct understanding of the saving message of Christ. In a truly christian perspective salvation and liberation are not mutually exclusive; nor are evangelization and humanisation opposed to each other. Interior renewal and social transformation are not unrelated realities. Faith is not merely vertical, nor can love be purely horizontal. They unite in the life

2. Cf. Walbert Bühlmann, *The Coming of the Third Church*, Slough, St. Paul's Publication, 1974, p. 164.

3. Ibid, p. 165.

4. Cf. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, London, SCM, 1974 p. 7ff.



and death of Jesus Christ. Jesus was fully relevant to the world of his day without the least hurt to his identity in relation to the Father. That identity in fact is the basis of Christ's relevance. The same must become true in the life of Christians.

### **Change and the individual**

Some hold that social transformation would come about naturally once there is interior transformation in the individual. Is not society made up of individuals? Is it not individual hearts that the Gospel of the Kingdom must touch? But the unfortunate fact is that circumstances and situations are rarely at the disposal of the goodwill of individuals! Many a problem which troubles people has shifted today from the sphere of the individual to that of the established social order. The result is that the conversion of individuals alone do not and cannot set such things right. The problems of individuals have today become the problems of society. And the problems of society call for social and political intervention. When in the wake of evangelization the community of believers gets organised, problems of education, employment etc. arise. These must be solved.

Another school of thought holds that transformed circumstances would transform man. This is not true. This is acceptable only to those for whom man is but a product of social circumstances. There can be fruitful evangelization only when internal individual changes are accompanied by external social changes too.

### **In lands in process of development**

There is one point we may never forget in the context of evangelization. "The Church has the duty to proclaim the liberation of millions of human beings . . . the duty of assisting the birth of this liberation"; liberation from "famine, chronic disease, illiteracy, poverty, injustices in international relations, and especially in commercial exchanges, situations of economic and cultural neocolonialism sometimes as cruel as the old political colonialism" (EN 30). But the liberation must be integral, affecting the human person in his totality: it must be a Gospel liberation. It cannot be merely economic, political, social or cultural. Earthly liberation alone does not satisfy

human beings. By it alone the Kingdom of God which Jesus dreamt of will not become a reality. If the process of liberation, starting at the level of the earth does not rise to the level of the spirit, it will prove meaningless. It will be a humanism which liberates man only in part. One of the modern tendencies in the area of evangelization is to see and present Jesus as a political revolutionary. But it is not Christian faith to portray Jesus as a political leader, or a revolutionary or a subversive. In his Puebla speech John Paul II said that "presenting Christ as a revolutionary ill accords with the teaching of the church". The Gospel of Jesus must transcend all political movements. In revolutions and post-revolutionary days one hears the cries of hatred and vengeance. The herald of Christ cannot echo these cries. He can only be spokesman of forgiveness and friendship, where, however human life is threatened, we should be bold enough to react. Where people are looked upon as things or as objects of emotional satisfaction we must uphold all the more the greatness and dignity of the human person. When the family and family life get caught in a view of society based solely on economic realities and begin to go to pieces, we must come forward to defend the dignity of marriage and the sacredness of the family. When freedom is so abused as to exploit unduly the resources of nature, and to deny to people their basic needs we have to proclaim loud and clear the demands of justice and social obligations. When the sick, the dying and the aged are relegated to loneliness we should make it clear that they have claims on our love and respect.<sup>5</sup>

### **Our task today**

A widely discussed topic of the day is inculturation in the process of evangelizing. The need of inculturation is generally admitted. In the middle ages and even later the Church was given to the idea that unity required uniformity. With the centralisation of Church government brought about through the council of Trent, the western Church began to be held up as model for all Churches everywhere. An attempt was made to abolish local cultural diversities. The small Churches of newly independent modern mission lands all have patterned

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5. Pope John Paul II, Homily at Washington Capitol Mall, on October 7, 1979; *Osservatore Romano*, Nov. 5, 1979.

themselves on the western Church. The effort of Roberto de Nobili to implement in the Indian mission his insights into a cultural approach to evangelization was nipped in the bud. As a result the Christian Church here still wear many foreign features. It has adopted some minor Indian social customs. But the image of Christ still adorning our churches and homes is that of a high-born handsome man with brown beard and hair. We seem to be fond of a European Christ though Jesus was an Asian, a Jew. Is this perhaps a reflection of our mentality which believes that the grass is greener on the other side and that we have to travel to western lands in search of creative theological thinking? This tradition must change. We have not yet discovered Christ in the circumstances of our own life. Christ is to be presented and experienced as all things to all peoples, as an African to Africans, a Westerner to Westerners, an Indian to Indians. This will be a service not to provincial chauvinism, but to the universal relevance of the Mystery of Christ. In such a presentation of Christ lies the greatness and success of evangelization. What the Christian communities in India need is boldness rather than caution, complete fidelity to Christ rather than conformity to yesterdays.<sup>6</sup>

How could the Mystery of Christ be indianized? The Indianness of the Mystery of Christ does not consist in an undiscerning use of attractive phrases found in Indian philosophies and Hindu religions. Mary clad in saree and Christ in the sadhu's garb alone will not make Christian religion Indian. It is necessary, rather, to discover the meaning of confessing Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour in today's India.

There are several instances in history of the power of Hinduism to absorb any culture that comes into close contact with it. The integrity of the faith must be safeguarded while the inculturation of the faith is being attempted. But if we stand apart in fear of the invincible power which Hinduism is within Indian culture, the proclamation of the Gospel in this land will only be heading for total failure. Several problems of this kind arose indeed when early Christian communities encountered Greek culture. Origen and Augustine used Plato's philosophy,

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6. Cf. S. J. Samartha, *The Hindu Response to the Unbound Christ* CLs Madras, 1974, p. 167.



and Thomas Aquinas used Aristotle's philosophy to present the Christian faith with relevance each to his age. What is the significance of this fact for us? More important than the fear that Hinduism might devour Christianity is the upholding of the credibility of our faith in Jesus Christ and the universal relevance of the Gospel of salvation which we proclaim.

In brief, the supreme goal of Indian 'thought is the living experience known as the realization of the Absolute.<sup>7</sup> This Indian view offers the possibility and the justification for an Indian interpretation of Christ based on experience. An Indian interpretation of Christ will have to be the expression of the experience of God that is in Christ. When the proclamation of the Gospel is Indianized through an experience-based Christ-interpretation it will not do merely to take in the view-points of the Vedas and the Upaniṣads. It is essential to give preponderance to the life-experience of contemporary men and women. It is vital to take into account modern India's social, political and economic problems. And the readiness of the Christian community for creative participation in nation-building must be in evidence. For the proclamation of faith in Jesus Christ to become meaningful within the social reality of the India of our day, it must be able to identify itself with the feelings of the oppressed and suffering millions of our land. The world will acknowledge the identity and uniqueness of the Christian faith only on condition that the faith proves to be resourceful and relevant in the search for solutions to people's live problems.

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7. Cf, Deviprasad Chattopadhyaya, *Bhāratiya Tattvacinta*, Current Books, Trichur, 1971, p. 75.

# The Achievement and Significance of Puebla

The Harvard theologian Harvey Cox, and Ms. Faith Annette Sand an associate editor of the journal *Missiology*, writing in *Christianity and Crisis* immediately after the Puebla Conference of the Latin American Bishops (Jan. 29. Feb. 13, 1979) answered the question, "What happened at Puebla:?"

Not very much, really. About 300 bishops, nearly a thousand journalists, hundreds of observers, guests, lobbyists and hangers-on- and one pope - mixed it up for nearly three weeks. The end result was a document that no one is ecstatic about, containing some dismal paragraphs, many that sound abstract and pompous, and some excellent sections - especially on the church's preferential option for the poor, the historical reality of Latin America today and the church's action on behalf of the human person in national and international society.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps, this was too harsh a judgment, understandable in the face of great fears as well as great expectations entertained by different people before the conference about it. The great achievement is a negative one, namely that it did not set the clock back and go back on the promisory note given by the Bishops ten years earlier at the Medellin conference, as there was abundant reason to fear; on the contrary, it presented a document which is a sign of a certain amount of maturity attained by Latin American theology. It states unequivocally the Church's renewed commitment to the liberation of the people of Latin America in the face of the modern challenges.

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1. Harvey Cox and Faith Annette Sand. "What Happened at Puebla?" *Christianity and Crisis* (C&C) vol. 39, n. 4 (March 19, 1979) p. 57.

## 1. Failure of the conservative challenge to Medellin

The second meeting of the Latin American Episcopal Conference (CELAM) at the Colombian city of Medellin in 1968 was a great turning point in the recent history of the Latin American church. The great majority of Latin Americans are Catholics and right from the Spanish days Catholicism was the state religion, and even after gaining independence from the Spanish crown the patronage over the Church was simply transferred to the fledgling republics. In the 1930's the Church was in alliance with the tyrannical conservative governments, and the social doctrine of the Church presented by the Popes like Leo XIII and Pius XI had no impact on the Latin American situation. In the 1950's and 60's centrist governments inspired by the spirit of Catholic Action came to power and against the threat posed by Castro's revolution in Cuba in 1959 and similar revolutionary groups in other parts the Church in collaboration with the governments launched several developmental programmes with the conviction "that the European and North American systems could provide the political instruments for development".<sup>2</sup> But under the shrewd manipulation of U. S. corporate interests this "Alliance for Progress", as it was called, was converted into a grotesque money tree for gaining billions of dollars of profit for the U. S. companies, at the same time, further impoverishing the Latin Americans. When the populist governments which were involved in these developmental projects failed to achieve the objective and became unpopular with the spectre of revolution looming large, they were replaced often through manipulation from the outside by military governments which were loyal to foreign interests and committed to maintaining the status quo of poverty, exploitation and oppression.

But in the light of the reforms inaugurated by Vatican II and under the inspiration of Pope Paul VI's audacious encyclical *Populorum Progressio* the 130 Bishops who met in CELAM II at Medellin suddenly woke up to the enormity of the Latin American socio-economic situation and the Church's own responsibility in it. Several independent economic and political

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2. Joseph Comblin quoted in *Puebla and Beyond* by John Eagleson and Philip Scharper ed. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Bks, 1979) p. 8



studies done by American and European scholars had already exposed the fraud involved in the so-called Alliance for Progress. Several of them used the Marxist sociological analysis to clarify the situation of neo-colonial dependence on capitalism and to show that the knowledge of reality is the first step in the transformation of society. Latin American theologians like Gustavo Gutierrez and Joseph Comblin gave intellectual content to the move towards liberation by bringing out that the essential message of the Gospel is the liberation of the whole man (*Lk* 4:18-19). The Liberation theology developed by them was the real dynamic force behind the pastoral thinking of the bishops. In this context, the Medellin Conference which was inaugurated and addressed by Pope Paul VI himself, publicly declared that the poverty of the masses and their repression in a Catholic continent was a "situation of sin". The bishops proclaimed the Church's rupture with existing social and political structures in order to promote a transfer of power to the impoverished masses. They also openly renounced the centuries old state of patronage of the Church, and publicly committed themselves to a transformation of the Church into a servant of the poor with neither privileges nor riches. The bishops broke with their past tradition and frontally attacked both neocolonialism and capitalism, along with the already condemned systems of Marxism and structures of violence.

But many interested parties were alarmed by the Medellin document and the trend towards liberation fostered by it. Nelson Rockefeller who visited Latin America in 1969 sounded the alarm in his report to President Nixon indicating that the resurgence of nationalism in the region was a threat to U. S. national security and to its investments, and that the Church with its growing influence on the masses was a dubious ally. Conservative bishops like Archbishop Alfonso Lopez Trujillo, secretary general of CELAM felt that Medellin had gone too far and carefully planned to counteract it at Puebla. Cardinal Sebastiano Baggio, prefect of the Sacred Congregation for Bishops and president of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America as well as several officials in the European Bishops' Conference that supplied funds to Latin America felt that CELAM was actually cutting the Latin America's roots in European culture. Conservative thinkers like the Belgian Jesuit Roger Vekemans, supported by huge funds

from CIA, German Misereor and De Rance Foundation launched a campaign to show that the Medellin conference was a Pandora's Box of Marxist revolution, and even well meaning people like Cardinal Gabriel Garrone, prefect of the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education publicly criticized CELAM leadership for their Theology of Liberation.

As the Puebla conference approached even President Carter is said to have instructed the CIA to keep a special watch over the "activist priests", because he did not want to see Iran repeated in Latin America. Archbishop Lopez Trujillo circulated in December 1977 a preliminary consultative document for Puebla on "Present and Future Evangelization of Latin America", directly countering the approach of Medellin, bringing back the time-worn idea of "development" as a "third way" between capitalism and Marxism in order to maintain the traditionally Catholic society on the ideals of European Christian democracy. Triumphalist in tone, it renounced Medellin's commitment to the poor in favour of doctrinal orthodoxy and political accommodation. But the majority of the Latin American Bishops' Conferences rejected the document as "weak", "confusing" and "superficial". Still, everything was done by Archbishop Trujillo and Cardinal Baggio to assure the conservative composition of Puebla. To counteract the liberal elements among the 175 delegates chosen by the Latin American Episcopal Conferences, Rome nominated 111 participants to "help" the bishops. Though Pope John Paul I is reported to have had a heated argument about this imposition on the eve of his death with the curial Cardinal, the list was approved by Pope John Paul II. Liberation Theologians who had an active role at Medellin were carefully excluded from among the periti or experts at Puebla.

In spite of all these elaborate preparations the move to bring back the old "middle way" failed at Puebla. The bishops could not ignore the reality: Latin American Church was no longer an entirely vertically structured church, everything coming down from the bishops and everybody looking up to them. It was more horizontally organized by the Spirit of God, drawing its life from thousands of base-level Ecclesial Communities. Just one year before Puebla four women of La Paz, Bolivia, who

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were outraged by the highhanded move of the military government that imprisoned their husbands for union activity among the mineworkers undertook a hungerstrike. Their bold manifestation of faith brought the episcopate that was in the beginning on the government side to back their protest and forced the government to grant general amnesty and freedom to the workers. The hundreds of thousands of poor people that lined the motorcade of the Pope from Mexico city to Puebla and in every manner expressed their cry for help to the Church could not fail to impress the Bishops. The Pope who on his way from San Domingo to Mexico expressed certain reservations about Liberation Theology was so much moved by his experience on the eight mile route to Puebla that he is reported to have rewritten his speech to the Indians at Oaxaca the next day hitting hard on such topics as the rights of the poor and the "social mortgage" on property. When the conference was over, at the concluding public Mass Archbishop Dom Helder Camara was able to say: "As Bishops we have not betrayed our people, but on the contrary, with divine grace have been able to carry further forward the strength of Medellin".

As Harvey Cox and Ms. Sand note with emphasis the theologians at Puebla showed a great deal of maturation in their style. Though the most important among them like Gutierrez, Segundo, Comblin, Sobrino, Boff, Assman and Ellacuria were not allowed to act as *periti* and be present at the conference, they were present at Puebla and consistently avoiding confrontation and sloganeering "worked quietly and patiently often in the small hours of the night" with the liberal bishops who went out to them from the conference seeking their counsel. John Sobrino said that he and his colleagues were not trying to "impose a theology on Puebla but rather to be of service to liberation". The more than forty Liberation Theologians outside the conference worked so efficiently that within four hours of the Pope's opening talk to the bishops they had a twenty page analysis of the talk written, duplicated and distributed among the Bishops. In the end the participating bishops acknowledged that at least twenty five percent of the final document was directly written by these outside experts.



## 2. Maturing of liberation theology

Another important point that can be noted in the Puebla document is the maturing of Liberation Theology. It is true that the conference and the document do not give any sort of recognition to Liberation Theology. In fact many of the Liberation Theologians themselves are actually disillusioned since liberation theology as a school of thought "has already been misused, coopted, eviscerated, idealized, and trivialized all at once".<sup>3</sup> While the Medellin conclusions gave no support to Marxism or revolution, left wing groups like the priests led by Gonzalo-Arroya openly identified themselves with the goals of the Allende government, and the Christians for Socialism seized on the document as support for their partisan politics.

Indeed, the liberation theologians generally used Marxist analysis to bring out the social implications of the Latin American situation. Many of them agreed with Sartre that "Marxism, as the formal framework of all contemporary philosophical thought, cannot be superseded".<sup>4</sup> But this confrontation with Marxism only made the theologians to search their own sources "to reflect on the meaning of the transformation of this world and the action of man in history".<sup>5</sup> Besides, many recognized that Marxism is not a simple theory of impersonal economics or of revolution but is concerned with integral human values. "New man" and "whole man" are themes actively being discussed in Marxist circles today. In their view, according to an early text of Marx, man would be defined not by what he has but by what he is; man appropriates his total essence in a total manner, that is to say as a whole man. As John C. Bennett remarks the more important fact is that the situation in many Latin American countries present object lessons of Marxist social thought: "Christians in many countries— and this is also true of Roman Catholics... believe that they have been helped by 'Marxist analysis' to understand their historical situations... It is interesting to me that the 'liberation theologians' make the

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3. Harvey Cox & Faith Sand. *l.c.* p. 59

4. Gustavo Gutierrez. *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1973. trs. and ed. Sr. Caridad Inda and John Eagleson,) p. 9.

5. *Ibid.*

same use of Marxism as did Reinhold Niebuhr in the 1930's. Niebuhr at that time found in it illumination concerning the situation in the United States during the depression and he drew important guidance from it for political strategy".<sup>7</sup> But later Niebuhr abandoned Marxism because it became irrelevant to the context. Bennett himself reports that in the context of the discussions about Marxism at the Puebla conference Father Pedro Arrupe, the Jesuit General, stated that being willing to use some Marxist analysis does not mean that you are buying the whole system.<sup>8</sup>

In Nicaragua the church, fully identifying itself with the Sandinist revolution, publicly announcing its moral and legal legitimacy, and seven Catholic bishops endorsing the "socialism" and the "class struggle" involved in the revolution, stated: "We are confident that the revolutionary process will be original, creative, profoundly nationalist and in no way imitative because the majority of Nicaraguans seek a process that marches toward a society that is authentically Nicaraguan and not capitalist, dependent or totalitarian."<sup>9</sup> Five Protestant pastors who followed suit declared: "We believe that Christians can honestly use Marxist analysis without ceasing to be Christians and can thus understand the mechanism of exploitation and domination."<sup>10</sup>

But Marxist analysis is only one source of inspiration among many for the Catholic theologians. Even that they did not adopt as an ideology but only as a tool to be used and as a challenge to reexamine the social message of the Gospel. As Patricia Weiss Iragan writes after a thorough survey of Latin American literature:

Increasingly Church writings have come to reflect both the experience of hundreds of clergy working among the poor in Latin America and in the case

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7. John C. Bennett. "The World Council under Attack: Neo-Conservative Realism vs. This World Realities." *C&C* vol. 39, n. 17 (Nov. 12, 1979) pp. 276-279.

8. *Ibid.*

9. Alan Riding. "New Nicaraguan Regime Recognizes Church's Potent Role" *New York Times*, Feb. 8, 1980 p. A 2.

10. *Ibid.*

of the Catholic Church the commitments taken by the Latin American bishops at the CELAM II meeting in Medellin, in 1968, statements from Church sources condemn the extremely inequitable economic development that has accompanied the rise of authoritarian Governments in Latin America. Unlike the international organizations described above (i. e. U. N. Human Rights Commission, Inter American Commission on Human Rights, Amnesty International and International Commission of Jurists) Church sources criticize not only governments but also the multinational corporations, banks and elite social classes that support present military governments.<sup>11</sup>

The Church sources start with the assertion that human rights correspond to accepted religious ethics and to the spirit of major theological statements since the *Pacem in Terris* of Pope John XXIII.<sup>12</sup>

Jürgen Moltmann points to a further controversy that has arisen in recent years in the heart of liberation theology itself, that demonstrates the need to go beyond the Marxist analysis: "Oppression has two sides. On the one side stands the Master, on the other the slave. On the one side stands the exploiter, on the other the victim. Oppressor becomes inhuman, the oppressed is dehumanized." Both need liberation. But the oppressor does not feel the need for liberation because he does not feel the suffering of his victims, and only feels the interests and desires of his mastery. Simply depriving him of the fruits of his aggression, as the Marxists demand, does not change his heart or liberate him. Just transferring the liberation theology of the oppressed to the side of the oppressor will only lead to despair. Hence it is important to search out the cause of oppression, whether it be racism, or sexism or capitalism. Those who find capitalism or sexism or racism as the root of evil do not go radical enough; they do not show why human beings fall into capitalistic or sexist or

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11. "Human Rights in Latin America; Learning from Literature" *C & C* 39 n. 20 (Dec. 24, 1979) pp. 328-333.

12. *Ibid.*



racist aggression. Condemnation of oppression remains superficial if it does not recognize the compulsive forms of action involved, existentially such actions are miscarried love of God, the most radical quest of human existence focussed in the wrong direction. Hence, the problem is not solved unless "the oppressor's relationship to the ground of his or her existence, to the abandoned God be changed". But this cannot be changed by man himself but only by the Ground of his being, God, who "was in Jesus Christ reconciling the world to Himself" (2 Cor. 5:19). The humanization of the oppressor happens only through faith. The history of humanity's struggle for power is simultaneously the history of God's passion. Those who have the total divine plan of human salvation in view cannot speak of the liberation of the oppressed alone, but must deal with the root of the situation of oppression itself.<sup>13</sup>

But traditionally freedom was always understood as mastery. Whether we are oppressors or oppressed, we are not liberated from this misunderstanding. Only the master is free in slaveholding society. Moltmann complains that even Gustavo Gutiérrez defines freedom in this way, a "gradual conquering (conquista)". But whoever understands freedom as conquest and mastery can be free only at the cost of the other. But, "the truth of freedom is found in unrestricted community; for the truth of human freedom is love. Other persons are free when I acknowledge them and open my life for them, sharing it with them".<sup>14</sup>

### 3. The positive vision of Puebla

The Puebla document clearly shows, as Harvey Cox and Ms. Sand point out, that "the Holy Spirit was alive and well in the Catholic labyrinth, for neither was liberation theology nullified nor were the progressive bishops silenced".<sup>15</sup> For, "it is hardly necessary for the Latin American church to go out to the poor. They are already within it, the people who pray at its altars, sing at its fiestas, trudge in its processions, honor

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13. Jürgen Moltmann with M. Douglas Meeks. "The Liberation of Oppressors." *C & C* vol. 38, n. 20 (Dec. 25, 1978) pp. 310-317.

14. *Ibid.*

15. Cox and Sand. *l.c.* p. 58

its saints. The poor are the church in Latin America. Their liberation from hunger, misery, unemployment and debt is not the liberation of some one else".<sup>16</sup> The simple fact that came out clearly from Puebla is "that the process of liberation is deepening and spreading. The poor are hearing the good news".<sup>17</sup> As the Panamanian bishop Marcus Mcgrath states comparing Medellin and Puebla: "Medellin was a prophetic voice that did not allow itself to be a mirror, reflecting the reality of Latin America. Puebla, on the other hand, articulates the reality of Latin America but has not allowed itself to be a prophetic message."

An examination of the "final document" shows that the Fathers of the Conference recognize the task of the Church 'to contribute its services to a better future for the people of Latin America, to their liberation and growth in all of life's dimensions', ( $\neq$  4) and "to the construction of a new society that is more fraternal and just" and "to carry the Gospel's message of salvation hopefully and bravely to all human beings, but to the poorest and most forgotten by way of preference" ( $\neq$  12). They define the task of liberation, in the words of Paul VI as "the struggle to overcome the things that condemn people to live on the margin of life: hunger, chronic diseases, illiteracy, impoverishment, injustice in international relations and particularly in commerical interchanges, situations of economic and cultural neocolonialism that are sometimes as cruel as political neocolonialism" ( $\neq$  26. *Evang. Nun.*  $\neq$  30). Pope John Paul II in his opening address traced the source of this widespread poverty to "mechanisms which, because they are impregnated with materialism rather than any authentic humanism, create a situation on the international level where the rich get richer at the expense of the poor, who get ever poorer"; he condemned the situation "as a scandal and a contradiction to Christian existence". The bishops after repeating the words of the Pope list in detail the sources of the people's slavery: (1) the ostentatious display of wealth by segments of society over against the extreme poverty of the masses ( $\neq$  38); (2) the progress oriented society that totally disregards people not engaged in product-

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16. *Ibid.* p. 59.

17. *Ibid.*

ion like the old and the sick ( $\neq$  39); (3) the general situation in which fundamental human rights like life, health, education, housing, work and human dignity itself are violated ( $\neq$  41); (4) the regimes based on force that engage in selective repression accompanied by accusations, violations of privacy, improper pressures, tortures, exiles, arrest and detention without judicial consent; (5) a system of justice that has been suborned or cowed ( $\neq$  42); (6) lack of social participation on various levels, in particular labour unionization ( $\neq$  44); (7) the free-market economy in its most rigid expression, which "gives priority to capital over labour, economics over the social realm", and the small groups often tied in with foreign interests that take advantage of the free market ( $\neq$  47); (8) ideologies of National Security adopted by authoritarian or totalitarian governments to abuse their power and violate human rights ( $\neq$  49); (9) the allotting of enormous resources for arms purchases than for the solution of vital problems ( $\neq$  67); (10) the presence of multinational conglomerates that often look after only their own interests at the expense of the country that welcomes them in ( $\neq$  66); and (11) lack of structural reforms in agriculture that adequately deal with specific realities ( $\neq$  68). Along with these causes are also listed (1) the guerilla violence and terrorism inflicted on people by various brands of extremists ( $\neq$  43), and (2) Marxist ideologies proposing utopian forms of unrealism and finding their inspiration in policies that use force as a basic tool, thus intensifying the spiral of violence.

What is the role of the Church in this concrete situation of poverty, exploitation and political repression? First of all, the Church must direct its social service programmes and material assistance, though insignificant and inadequate, to the liberation of the suffering masses. But its primary task is to bear witness to the total liberation of man proclaimed by Christ: "Everyday the Church turns back again to the Word of truth; follows the incarnate, crucified and risen Christ through the pathways of history; and becomes the handmaid of the Gospel in order to transmit it to human beings with full fidelity" ( $\neq$  349). In this it starts with the human person called to communion with God and human beings, and penetrating people's hearts and experiences, living patterns, culture and milieu create a new humanity and point toward a new way



of existing, judging and living as individuals and social being" ( $\neq$  350). This means a transformation of culture itself, "changing the structure in which people live so that" "they may be more fully human" ( $\neq$  395).

In this it is an important task of the Church to pay heed to the religion of the peoples, by which is meant, popular religiosity, popular piety, the complex of underlying beliefs rooted in God, and the basic attitudes and expression that flow from them. Since this basic religion has "already been evangelized, we must also accept it as an active evangelizing force" ( $\neq$  396-7). The fact that the pre-Columbian and African cultures of Latin America have been somewhat transformed by the encounter with Spanish and Portuguese peoples, should not be taken as a reason "to disregard the persistence of indigenous cultures or Afro-American cultures in a pure state, nor the existence of groups who are integrated into the nation in varying degrees" ( $\neq$  410). Recognizing "the impulses of humanity leading toward integration and universal communion" should not be taken as a pretext for creating a uniformity or levelling "that fails to respect different cultures by weakening them, or annihilating them" or for using universality as a tool to inculcate the unjust, offensive supremacy and domination of some peoples or social strata over other peoples or social strata" ( $\neq$  427).

In the area of liberation the principal task of the Church is "to arouse human awareness in every dimension and to make human beings themselves the active protagonists of their own human and Christian development". Though the bishops are against resorting "to violence of any sort or to the dialectics of class struggle" ( $\neq$  486) they do not fail to speak out openly against the rich and the powerful as a class and to show that wealth is an idol and a serious obstacle to freedom ( $\neq$  493). They define liberation as freedom "from the forms of bondage, from personal and social sin, and from everything that tears apart the human individual and society", and "violate basic rights that come from God" ( $\neq$  482. 485). They also point an accusing finger at the developed nations as being responsible for the devastating effects of an uncontrolled process of industrialization and the consumptionist tendencies which do not

take into account "the elementary needs of the poor peoples who constitute the majority of the world's population" (# 496).

Another important area of liberation indicated by the bishops is from the control and ideological manipulation of the media of social communication exercised by political and economic groups that seek to maintain the status quo or even to create a new order of dependence and domination. The means for this is to educate the public about the dynamics of these mass media and to train them to adopt a critical attitude towards the bombardments launched by them (# 1069-79. 1088).

The positive factor of liberation is growth in communion with God and fellow human beings, first in the family, and in the immediate local community, extending it further into the whole nation and to the whole world. In this respect the bishops recognize the significance and role of Base-level Ecclesial Communities which have increased to more than a hundred thousand in number since the Medellin conference. In spite of the misgivings voiced about the relative independence of these communities from the hierarchical church and the possibility of their being exploited by political causes and factions, the Conference recognizes them as unique Latin American phenomenon, a work of the Holy Spirit, that "create more personal interrelations, acceptance of God's Word, re-examination of one's life, and reflection on reality in the light of the Gospel" and bring more committed involvement in the family, the neighborhood and the local community (629).

#### 4. The limitations and drawbacks of Puebla

As in any other Conference or Synod, the tensions and contradictions of its membership is clearly reflected in the Puebla document too. Comprising as it did bishops from a good number of countries, vastly different in economic, social and cultural conditions, its practical suggestions and recommendations are less than specific. Strongly weighted on the conservative side frightened by even the remote possibility of a Marxist take over, the document speaks at length against ideologies. Hence it is deeply suspicious of Liberation Theology also; it did not permit even a simple grateful mention of that theology which was the

most dynamic force behind Medellin and all the theological developments later. All the important liberation theologians were excluded from the conference, and the majority of its periti were outspoken critics of liberation theology. The framework of the final document was fixed by the conservative theologians and the more than forty liberal theologians who worked from the outside could in no way modify the framework but only add to the content. The conference and the document do not recognize this tension between a conservative dogmatic theology and the liberal pastoral outlook of the bishops, nor investigate the causes of such a tension.

There are two distinct theologies in the document which remain parallel. On the one side we have the dogmatic Christology and Ecclesiology of the conservative theologians that emphasize the divine personality of Christ, his lordship over all things ( $\neq$  170-219) and present a triumphalist view of the Church, the trustee and transmitter of the Gospels, who seems to stand above the people and demands that all local communities including the Base level Ecclesial Communities be inscribed and subordinated to its historical, institutional, well-defined, universal structure, as if the two constituted two entirely different entities. "The role of pastors is eminently paternal", and the unity of the people is said to be "basically woven together in an upward direction" ( $\neq$  221-339). It looks as if this part of the document was taken straight from some manual of dogmatic theology used in seminaries. On the other hand the pastoral sections present a Servant Christ, the Christ of the Synoptic Gospels, who "gives meaning to all human aspirations and achievements, but also continually calls them into question and goes infinitely beyond them" ( $\neq$  353). And they present a Church that is the People of God, the pastors and the people inspired and animated by the same Spirit of God; a church concretely realized in Base level Ecclesial Communities in mutual communion, "summoning human beings of all races and peoples to unite in faith under Christ" ( $\neq$  425); "a servant Church that prolongs down through the ages Christ, the servant of Yahweh", and proclaims that all are children of God in Christ, and commits itself to the liberation of the whole human being and all human beings" ( $\neq$  nn. 1303-1305). No real effort is made in the document to reconcile these parallel theologies. The document itself is very repetitious and unneces-



sarily long, factors that do not contribute to clarity and intelligibility.

Perhaps the ambiguity and ambivalence of the final document are deliberate, calculated to avoid a conservative-liberal confrontation. It shows the human side of the Church. At least some of the bishops are confused and frightened by the changes and worried about the prospect of losing the grass roots. At the same time as explicitly welcoming and encouraging the change in the mentality of the people in the past decade to an adult and critical attitude regarding both religious and socio-political matters, the bishops also look rather uneasy about losing their traditional control over the people. Another feature of this human character of the Church is that always there are two tendencies in the Church, one to identify itself with the poor and the oppressed, and the other to take advantage of the benefits of having the rich and the powerful on its side.

But the most important point for Christian theology is that both Medellin and Puebla are signs that the Greek era in the church has definitely ended. The mainstay of Greek theology was a sort of vertical pneumatology that made the Holy Spirit almost the exclusive prerogative of Church administration. It created an idealistic type of dogmatic theology, which was then in tune with the thinking in other fields as well, in philosophy, science and culture, moving from ideas and principles to practical application in life. That idealism came to a climax in the 19th century German Romanticism which met with its competent rival in the thinking of Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, Nietzsche and Karl Marx. These moved away from preconceived ideals to concrete life and practice and recognized the worth of the ordinary man. The class room dogmatics of the conservative theologians at Puebla look rather irrelevant and pedantic by the side of the deeper theology shining out of the pastoral experience of the bishops. What the world is experiencing today is no longer a vertical pneumatology with a church looking upwards to the Pope and the bishops who are presumably above and over it, but rather a return to the Semitic and Chaldean horizontal understanding of the Spirit animating the whole People of God, of which administration and magisterium are only functions and services. Even modern science with its Quantum physics and

principle of indeterminacy has moved away from idealistic pattern of Newtonian science. Hence to remain with the old dogmatics and endeavour to conform everybody to its ideals will be anachronistic and out of tune with the rest of contemporary experience.

As Harvey Cox and Faith A. Sand remark, the important point about Puebla conference is that "at Puebla the leaders of a divided Church on an exploited continent began to come to terms not only with their own divisions but also with the fact that increasing numbers of Christians are fighting back and in the very act of fighting back are finding out what it means to follow Jesus in Latin America today".<sup>18</sup> It will be foolish for other countries simply to copy or imitate the Latin American experience. But there is for all one lesson that stands out in the Latin American experience: Today the Church can more effectively accomplish her mission in the world if instead of merely exhorting the rich and the powerful to be nice and gentle to their poor and oppressed victims it foregoes its political advantages and privileges and courageously bears witness to the Gospel it has received and openly denounces the injustices and inequalities in the world of today as a situation of sin.

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18. *Ibid.* p. 60

# Evangelization, Truth and Manipulation

Looking through studies and comments on the Puebla Conference of Latin American Bishops, I was struck by the recurrence of two themes: the theme of truth and the theme of manipulation. Both are related, in contrary ways, of course, to the central theme of the conference, *Evangelization in Latin America's Present and Future*. And both, it seems to me, are of far wider relevance and of vital import. Hence the following brief meditation on truth and manipulation in the context of evangelization.

## a. Truth

The service of the Gospel is bound up with the Name, the Person and the Mission of Jesus. Jesus once described his own mission as witnessing to the truth (Jn 18:37). The truth of which he is witness is the reality of the relationship between God and our world. Jesus bears witness to this by being the embodiment in history of God's regard and love for human beings; by being the concrete translation in historical terms of God's faithfulness to mankind (cf. Jn 14:6). Evangelization is a matter of respect and fidelity to this truth: a matter of letting it take hold of us, mould and transform us, shine through us, and reach out into the lives of others and into the social milieu in which we exist.

Our witness to this truth is always a co-witnessing with the Spirit of Jesus, the Spirit of truth (Jn 15:26-27; Ac 1:8). Evangelization is authentic to the extent we are open to the Spirit of truth and the truth of the Spirit. It calls for truthfulness and a delicate sensitivity to the ways of truth and the ways of the Spirit. Now the Spirit is free, and his ways are like the ways of the wind. The wind blows where it will, and declines to follow directives as to its comings and goings. The Lord is Spirit and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom (2 Cor 3:17). The Gospel of freedom refuses to be



bound. The evangelizer is the servant of the truth he bears, not its master. He has to follow and obey; he may not dictate to it nor lay down rules. The truth that makes us free, is free, and will brook no manipulation.

It was in terms of truth and fidelity to truth that Pope John Paul II spelt out the meaning and scope of evangelization in his Mexican talks, especially in his opening speech at Puebla. Bishops are teachers of the truth about Jesus Christ, about the Church's mission and about human beings. Truth, fidelity, wholeness and preferential love for the neediest emerged as the major lines of the Pope's message to and from Mexico.

In India our ancestors understood life as a quest for the real and the true (*asato ma sad gamaya*: Br. Up.). They were convinced that the face of truth would one day be unveiled (Svet. Up.), and that the victory of truth is a certainty (*satya-meva jayate*). For Gandhiji life was an 'experiment with truth', a *satyagraha*; truth to him was God.

When therefore one reads again and again of manipulation in connection with a Bishops' Conference on Evangelization in a situation beset with acute human problems and filled with tragedy, one finds oneself face to face with a serious matter calling for self-criticism, conversion and vigilance.

## **b. Manipulation**

In 1968 in their Medellin Conference, the Latin American Bishops discovered that the situation of their people was worse than they had suspected. For the first time in history they recognized that the continent was living in a "situation of sin". The poverty of the people and their repression was a scandal. The ruling classes, the foreign monopolies and the "international imperialism of money" which they represented were responsible for "institutionalized violence" against the masses. The Bishops therefore proposed to help transform Latin American society through radical changes, including education of the poor and organisation of the people. In opting for the poor and for transfer of power to the impoverished masses, the Church was breaking with existing socio-political structures, renouncing

centuries old state patronage and privileges, and changing into a community church and servant of the poor. The Bishops condemned not only Marxism but neo-colonialism and capitalism. (P. Lernoux, "The Long Path to Puebla" in *Puebla and Beyond*, New York, 1979, pp. 11-12). After Medellin "the Church began to make a decided commitment to the world". It turned to the vast majority of the population, the poor and oppressed multitudes. It became "the voice of those who had no voice", and "carried out a huge effort at prophetic denunciation". It began to be concerned "about the historical efficacy of christian love"; it encouraged radical structural changes, established solidarity with the poor; called for organised movements of the common people, produced new forms of theological reflection, gave up its worldly character and "bravely faced up to persecution and martyrdom, seeing all of them as privileged signs of its truth" (J. Sobrino, "The Significance of Puebla for the Catholic Church in Latin America", in *Puebla and Beyond*, 1979, p. 290).

All this caused anxiety in Washington and in Rome. What Washington did to protect its investments in Latin America, to strengthen totalitarian regimes which ruled by assassination and torture, to enhance and prolong the repression of the people will not be described here. In Rome Cardinal Garrone in a widely publicised letter chastised CELAM's (Episcopal Conference of Latin America) leadership and the Confederation of Latin American Religious for placing too much emphasis on liberation education which might lead to politicisation. Conservative Bishops in Latin America also spoke against the emphasis laid on liberation. The Belgian Jesuit Roger Vekemans who worked closely with Christian Democrats and whose development institutes in Chile were used as channels for CIA funds in the 1964 elections, equated liberation theology with theology of violence and sedition, and sought to evoke fear and thereby obtain funds from the German Bishops' agency Misereor for a crusade against liberation theology. The crusade was a veritable smear campaign sustained by sizable sums from a \$ 100 million and over donated to CELAM by *Adveniat* (P. Lernoux, art. cit., p. 14 and note 61). Vekemans had only to cry communism and the panicky west German Bishops rushed to provide millions of dollars for his cause. A triple force was thus organised against liberation theology and the spirit of Medellin: CELAM, *Adveniat* and the

Roman Curia. In 1976 they organised in Rome a meet of anti-liberationist theologians and social scientists. Vekemans used the occasion to press home his thesis that base-level communities and liberation theology were channels of communist infiltration and carriers of Marxist contagion. The campaign was so vile that over one hundred German theologians questioned Adveniat's sponsorship of and alliance with so ambiguous a figure as Vekemans. "They further questioned the actions of Bishop Franz Hengsbach, Adveniat's director and military bishop of the German armed forces, noting that he had received the Condor of the Andes decoration from the Bolivian military regime, the highest honor in Bolivia. The decoration was "grotesque", said the theologians, in view of the Bolivian government's persecution of the Church and the famous CIA "Banzer Plan" (P. Lernoux, *loc. cit.* pp 21-22).

"The Roman Curia supposed (and still supposes)", writes the Belgian theologian Jose Comblin, "that Latin America's social problems had to provoke a communist attack there". Ecclesiastical officials therefore saw the Medellin Conference as opening a door for communist infiltration of the Church. "Since then the Roman Curia has tried to control the Latin American Episcopal Conference (CELAM) and, in a way, succeeded when its staff was "renewed" in a sort of coup d'etat in November 1972". After that the main care of CELAM staff has been struggle against communism. For various national episcopal conferences too, communism is "a top-priority problem in a reflection of Rome's pre-occupation with it" (J. Comblin, *The Church and the National Security State*, New York, 1979, pp. 201-202). In a fine analysis Comblin shows that "the reasons the Church joins the battle against communism so willingly are neither doctrinal nor pastoral; they are geopolitical. The Church exists in the West; the West seeks security in fighting the East (communism); so the Church seeks its geopolitical security in doing the same". The true reason for forbidding all collaboration with communist or marxist parties is the security and survival of the Church's institutional system. For "there is a specific complicity between the political goals of the Church and those of the West: the security of both is based on the same foundation" (J. Comblin, *ibid.* pp. 174-78).



Thus, then, "because of the Church's anti-communist geopolitics, the action of its prophetic minorities against the new rightist totalitarian systems has been limited and controlled... The institutional Church is more tolerant towards rightist totalitarian states than towards leftist states because the former are firm barriers against communism" (J. Comblin, *ibid.* p 202).

Speaking of his expectations for the Puebla conference, Jose M. Gonzalez Ruiz of Spain referred to the difference in effects produced by liberation theology on Spain and on Italy. In Italy too liberation theology and its prophetic stance was loudly echoed, but there "we have the enclave of the "Vatican State" which directly interferes in Italian politics through the manipulation (increasingly less efficient) of the conscience of the average Roman Catholic. This has greatly impeded and isolated all the movements for liberation within the church which has arisen in all the corners of Italy. Giulio Girardi and Giovanni Franzoni are the best known cases of such marginalization" (Gonzalez Ruiz answers the question, "What do you expect from CELAM III?" in *The Church at the Crossroads*, IDOC Europe Series No. 6, 1978, p. 180). Gonzalez Ruiz goes on to point out how *Adveniat* and *Misereor*, originally conceived with progressive policies, "are used today in no small proportion to restrain the dynamism which was born in Medellin". He also recalls the document which the German theologians sent to their Bishops, "expressing suspicion about direct or indirect CIA manipulation of these apostolic movements to prevent them from advancing "more than they should", and to reduce through National Security doctrine "the prophetic impetus of apostolic and pastoral movements all over Latin America". His fear was that "if CELAM is manipulated by its "enlightened right wing" headed by Secretary Lopez Trujillo, the issue of human rights would be reduced to the 'bourgeois freedoms' of the classic democracies. "Those freedoms can be fully achieved in one country at the cost of their suppression in other satellite or semi-colonized countries... If U. S. citizens want to enjoy basic freedoms they must exercise a rigid control over the other peoples of America, Africa and Europe for whom the same freedoms become then the object of a bargain" (*ibid.* p. 181).

### c. Manipulation

The "renewal" of CELAM staff referred to earlier and help from Roger Vekemans and the Roman Curia made Lopez Trujillo CELAM's secretary general in 1972. Trujillo lost no time in dismantling the CELAM departments associated with Medellin. The sections which survived were restaffed with conservative European theologians who had a disdain for Latin American upstart liberation theology. Trujillo's plan to manipulate the Puebla conference was disclosed through the publication of a taperecorded letter which he had dictated to Archbishop Luciano J. Cabral Duarte of Aracaju, Brazil. The cassette tape was accidentally given by Trujillo to a reporter who came to interview him and ran out of his own. In the letter the secretary general belittled Cardinals Lorscheider, Arns and Pironio as well as the head of the Jesuits, Father Arrupe (cf. M. Sandoval, "Report from the Conference", in *Puebla and Beyond*, p. 37).

The theme for the conference, Evangelization in Latin America's Present and Future, was, according to Sandoval, selected by CELAM and the Vatican "with the design of bringing the Church back to what Lopez Trujillo and other Latin American conservatives saw as its primary concern: the "spiritual" dimension as distinguished from the socio-economic and political preoccupations of the liberation movement (ibid. p. 34).

The preliminary consultative document for Puebla, written by Trujillo's staff of social scientists and theologians, and released in December 1977, was the "central piece of the campaign" against liberation theology and its basic human christian concerns. It was the chief instrument of attack after the non-success of Vekeman's vilification campaign in America and Europe, after the German theologians' denunciation of defamation tactics by people close to armed forces, military dictatorships, and CIA plans and moneys, and after the refusal of Vatican's International Theological Commission to condemn liberation theology. The preparatory document was a plea for developmentalism, for a new Christendom, for a third way between capitalism and communism; it had an overlay of western colonialism, an attitude of homage to western culture, the culture of the dominant white civilization, and a surprising reliance on

European theology. "Triumphant in tone and authoritarian in its view of a top-bottom church, the document renounced Medellín's commitment to the poor and oppressed in favour of doctrinal orthodoxy and political accommodation, albeit critical, with existing power-structures." With the help of this document Puebla was to be "a last chance to deal the theology of liberation a death blow and to stop the liberalization process begun by Medellín" (P. Lernoux, art. cit. p. 20-23).

The intent of the document was to reverse the history unleashed by Medellín. An attempt was being made to go back to a church which was more familiar, in which one knew right from the start what answers to give to any problems that might arise, and which did not have to face the dangers of proclaiming the good news to the poor (J. Sobrino, art. cit., p. 291). A team of Peruvian theologians found in that document a subtle rejection of Medellín and an attempt to discredit its conclusions (Some Notes on the Preparatory Document for Puebla, IDOC, op. cit., p. 192). Sobrino thinks that the fears and warnings the Pope expressed about some aspects of Latin America's ecclesial life "reflect the thought of his advisers more than his own". Why? Because these remarks deal with concrete Latin American situations which the Pope had no time to analyse; because their language is typical of CELAM secretariat; and because they allude to some problems which are allegedly touchy in Latin American theology when in fact they are not. Such are the allusions to contradictory and incorrect interpretations of Medellín, parallel magisterium, new church etc. Sobrino is pointing out the fact that the Pope was insufficiently informed or even misinformed. That is why the Pope could say that in Latin American church membership may not cause persecution but disdain and marginalization while the reverse is the truth; and he could enumerate "war, hatred and subversion" as the enemies of peace while passing over in silence the generalised state of repression (J. Sobrino, art. cit., p. 293).

It seems that to those responsible for the preparatory documents the basic problem of evangelization in Latin America was cultural. Their attention was centred on the problem and promises of the emerging urban-industrial civilization and of the civilization of love which the Church was there to create. The



obvious, wide-spread, acute sufferings of the masses of the people, the colossal exploitation and repression of which they are the victims, the economic and political realities which lie at the roots of Latin America's grave crises are all viewed as secondary (C. Boff, "The Illusion of a New Christendom", in *IDOC*, p. 65). Boff shows how "the preparatory document closes its eyes" to three real problems: (a) The positive character of secularization which is inseparably linked to urban-industrial development and forces of economic production. For an urban-industrial society to be or not to be secular does not depend on anybody's will, neither of the people nor of the church. (b) The document ignores or minimizes the tensions and divisions in the Latin American church. "To be silent about the conflicts that divide the church body into politically irreconcilable positions is like trying to cover the sun with a sieve." If evangelization is a task carried on in history and in society, "how can we close our eyes to divisions of a class nature"? In the final message from Puebla, where people are exhorted not to be impressed by reports that the episcopate is divided, there is an admission of "differences of opinion and outlook" but still the tone is idealist: there is no clear admission of conflict, no analysis of divisions. (c) The document also closes its eyes as regards the specific means by which its project of a civilization of love could be achieved. It merely refers to the social doctrine of the church as a necessary mediation between faith and praxis, ignoring the many serious criticisms of this social doctrine, and the inadequacy of the political experiences like Christian Democracy which it has inspired (C. Boff, in *IDOC*, p. 66-67; Sobrino, art. cit., p. 298). The fact is that "the modern 'social doctrine' of the magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy ... not only can incur errors but in fact incurred serious mistakes, some of them of considerable importance. Faced by this, Catholics benefit from full freedom of conscience in orienting their socio-political praxis rooted in charity...Therefore it is absurd to pretend that the social doctrine of the Church is a necessary mediation between faith and praxis". It is a misunderstanding, even, a great mistake, to believe that the Pope and the bishops can order Roman Catholics how to behave in social and political matters (Jose Maria Diez op. cit., Alegria, "A New Presentation of the Social Doctrine of the Church", in *IDOC*, op. cit., p. 85-91).

One of the strongest exposures and condemnations of the manipulation of the preparatory document came in a statement signed by some Spanish leaders and communities: two bishops, 54 professors of theology, 17 catholic movements, 101 christian popular communities and 6 magazines. The statement said: "The silence about the terrible persecution presently suffered by the noblest and most responsible groups in Latin America is both surprising and scandalous. All over the world, movements promoting human rights and social justice have clearly and strongly denounced the thousands of assassinations by torture, the concentration camps, the thousands of exiles... Among the persecuted, imprisoned, tortured, killed or disappeared, there are thousands of Christians and many priests and religious. Yet in the preparatory document there is scarcely any allusion to what this means in terms of conversion for the Church... In these crucial moments in the history of Latin America, when we expect a clear and courageous word from the Church, all that we get is clerical playing with words which do not say anything to a critical conscience, much less come close to the clear "yes or no" of Jesus' words. Does the Church not feel ashamed of its connivance and extreme cautiousness in situations which as a whole are negations of God and of humanity? What credibility can the Church expect to gain if it is more interested in saving its institutional face than in committing itself as far as persecution for those who are Jesus' favorite ones and against those who put Jesus himself to death?" (*IDOC*, op. cit, p. 216)

While deterioration of the total situation and of the quality of life is recognized, the response is not to go forward in denouncing injustice, but in looking for a cultural approach, for a middle way between capitalism and socialism, thus taking a reformist road and actually favoring the present regimes "most of them based on extreme forms of capitalism". Instead of starting with the situation of the oppressed people and its analysis, the document starts with a priori intellectual analysis. Its timid denunciation of capitalism and neo-fascist militarism is softened by presenting institutional and structural violence and injustice as a reaction to chaos and revolutionary violence, and stress is laid on "the dangers which the commitment of Christians to overcome these situations poses to their faith!"

According to Sobrino, much effort was invested at the preparatory stage of the Conference "in channelling it toward neutral balance, disembodied calmness and a prudent tone of advice and admonition concerning deviations and dangers". As a result Puebla became a struggle between those "who were more interested in watering down the novel and conflict-ridden aspects of the ecclesial reality of Latin America, and that reality itself as brought out by other spokes-men (Sobrino, art. cit. p. 295-96).

Among the several significant omissions in the document for Puebla there is one, says a team of Peruvian theologians, "that savours of treason". The document was "silent on the existing cause for which hundreds of campesinos (peasants), workers, common people, students, priests and nuns have shed their blood in recent years. Because of their fidelity to the Lord and love for the cause of the poor they are the victims of the hatred, violence and terrorism of dominant powers". The theologians call this "symptomatic forgetfulness". They conclude that the text which omits to record the testimonies of faith given in real deaths has no right to speak of the resurrection (A team of Peruvian Theologians, "Some Notes on the Preparatory Document for Puebla", *IDOC*, op. cit. p. 191). We have already noted above the indignation registered by Spanish communities and leaders at this incredible omission.

Despite such representations and demands the matter was not given due attention even in the final document of Puebla. John Sobrino writes: "There is another omission (in the final document) that is very difficult to explain. There were repeated petitions to correct it. I am talking about the concrete experience of martyrdom in the Latin American Church. It embraces the hierarchy, priests, religious men and women, and the people in general; and it has taken the form of threats, imprisonment, expulsions and murders. Of course there are allusions to this experience. Joyous approval is accorded to this experience of persecution for the faith and for justice; but it was not made one of the leading themes of the document. Perhaps there was fear of angering repressive governments... What is certain is that the document did not give this experience the value it deserved" (Sobrino, art. cit. p. 299).

The case of National Security is similar to that of martyrdom. One of the most telling criticisms of the preparatory documents was "their paucity of critical reference to the *seguridad nacional* (national security) despite the fact that its doctrine and practice, its totalitarianism and brutality were everywhere on the continent and quite evident (Robert McAfee Brown, "The Significance of Puebla for the Protestant Churches of North America, in *Puebla and Beyond*, p. 338).

#### d. Manipulation

Many Bishops' Conferences and base-level communities rejected the disastrous consultative document. Christian thinkers and peoples' organisations around the world criticized it severely. It therefore had to go for revision by a committee headed by Cardinal Lorscheider. Meanwhile the CELAM Secretary General remained on the offensive. The Latin American Bishops were bombarded with publications produced by CELAM and Vekeman's Institute, and financed by the De Rance Foundation based in Milwaukee. Liberation theology and the Conference of Religious were singled out for abuse by Uruguayan lawyer Alberto Methol Ferre, a member of the CELAM Lay Department, a close associate of Trujillo and conservatives' spokesman for accommodation with military regimes (P. Lernoux, art. cit, p. 24).

Trujillo's secretariat in the meantime took to "manipulative efforts to exclude Bishops and theologians who would rock the boat" (McAfee Brown, art. cit. p. 346). "The majority of the 360 members of the conference were... centrist or conservative in tendency. The selection process helped to ensure that" (Sobrinho, art. cit. p. 296). The process was controlled by Trujillo and his powerful ally in the Vatican Cardinal Sebastian Baggio. All but some 20 to 25 of the 175 delegates elected by Latin American Bishops' Conferences were conservatives or centrists with rightist leanings. Baggio prevailed upon Pope John Paul I to name 12 additional delegates with voice and vote; and these were unanimously right-wing. Baggio wanted the pope to appoint 105 more, and reports have it that the pope had a heated argument over this issue with the curial cardinal. John Paul II approved the curia's request. The idea was to block as much as possible openings to progressives and progressive ideas.



And the result was the exclusion of most of the Bishops who were "in the vanguard of evangelization that is truly liberating, living a life of poverty, defending human rights, encouraging formation of the christian base communities and enduring... persecution because of their identification with the poor and the oppressed" (P. Lernoux, art. cit., p. 24; Sandoval, art. cit. p. 31).

In a move of particular vindictiveness Lopez Trujillo barred the directors of CLAR (Confederation of Latin American Religious) from attending Puebla, although at Medellin they had both voice and vote. "This caused such an outcry, including a threat by Lorscheider to resign CELAM Presidency, that cardinal Baggio's office had to send the religious a belated invitation" (P. Lernoux, art. cit. p. 24).

Baggio and Trujillo got the Pope to appoint all the 16 experts for the conference from nominees suggested by the Curia or by episcopal conferences, while for Medellin the Bishops had been free to bring their own experts. Rome's nominees for Puebla turned out to be mostly conservative (Sandoval, art. cit, p. 31).

Cardinal Aloisio Lorscheider, president of CELAM, was at first designated presiding officer of the Puebla conference. Later this office was expanded to a group of three: Lorscheider, Baggio and the conservative Ahumada of Mexico. "Thus any advantage that the progressives may have had originally with the progressive Lorscheider at the helm was erased" (Sandoval, art. cit., p. 30-31).

Puebla, the conference venue, chosen by Trujillo, is a city of numerous massive churches, an ornate cathedral and many colonial buildings; a place, we are told, with an atmosphere of bygone days. Was Puebla selected for its being a colonial reliquary and for its conservative atmosphere? The conference was held in a huge seminary named after a 17th century viceroy-archbishop of Mexico, and built on an 80 acre campus surrounded by stone walls of over 10 ft high. Even before the bishops began to arrive, street demonstrations and press conferences were held by some businessmen and students, denouncing liberation theology. They were given support by a reactionary press hostile to

Medellin, liberation and progress. Printed calumnies against Bishops and theologians were circulating through the streets of Puebla. There were complaints by human rights groups and other lobbyists of intimidation by right-wing catholics, government officials and "auxiliaries" hired by CELAM to provide security for the Bishops. The local bishops and state intelligence agents told a group of progressive priests not to meet for a planned daily service of prayer for and witness from each country represented at the bishops' conference. Priests of a parish received ecclesiastical and police threats because their house was open for meetings of liberation groups (cf Sandoval art. cit. p. 29, 37-38; Sobrino art. cit., p. 297).

Work on the final document began, section by section, immediately after the conference met. The participants were thus kept isolated in small groups. "writing with pencil and paper", as one bishop put it, without opportunities for mingling and free exchange of ideas. This too was unlike Medellin where work on the final document was preceded by a week of open exchange and dialogue, giving the truth a chance. Even the plenaries provided no opportunities for frank expression of views except towards the end when it was too late effectively to influence the thought of the assembly or the written drafts (Sandoval, art. cit. 35). There was no provision for open-ended dialogue, no atmosphere for useful and stimulating public debate. Nearly all the drafts were dominated by the social and theological thought of CELAM's official experts. A draft which somehow "expressed gratitude for the services of a theology that explored liberation more deeply in line with Medellin" was suppressed; an action which Bishop Flores passionately denounced and described as mean (Sandoval art. cit. 35; Sobrino, art. cit. p. 297). In the final draft there is inadequate treatment of the political question, inadequate mention of institutional violence and of non-violent social transformation such as is practised by Helder Camara. Its picture of political reality is too idealised and its vision of the church's presence in the political field too elevated. Quite insufficient is its confession of the Church's lapses, especially the church's "complicity with the earthly powers", its neglect of indigenous and Afro-American peoples, and its undervaluation of women (Joseph Gremillion, "The significance of Puebla for

the Catholic Church in North America", in *Puebla and Beyond*, p. 324-25; Sobrino, art. cit. p. 298).

e. "Reality struggled to get a hearing"

This is a sad story, this story of manipulation of a conference of bishops on evangelization. It is evident that "Lopez Trujillo had attempted to turn the Church and history back to a hierarchical age. His efforts to assemble an overwhelming conservative majority at Puebla, his exclusion of Latin America's best-known theologians, his selection of a process that denied leadership the chance to surface and coalitions the opportunity to form - these along with the regressive consultative document that CELAM prepared, reveal the design of an attempt to manipulate the conference" (M. Sandoval, art. cit. p. 41-42). We have to tell this distressing story and ponder it because it is by no means rare or unique. This story is a sample. Does it make us fear for the truth about human beings, about the church and its mission, about Jesus Christ and about God?

But the truth which makes us free cannot itself be kept under lock and key. It cannot be buried and its tomb sealed. It will rise. Truth will out. *Satyameva jayate*. "For all the careful planning to ensure Puebla's rejection of Medellin, neither Vekemans nor Trujillo nor Baggio could control one crucial factor - reality. The picture of Latin America... when the Bishops met at Puebla was much darker than it had been at Medellin. Every yardstick of social progress showed a worsening in the plight of the masses, and with the poverty had come increasing repression... All across the continent came the cry of a suffering people, a cry that could not be stifled by any amount of anti-liberation propaganda" (P. Lernoux, art. cit. p. 25). That cry is the reality no manipulation could kill.

The final document admits that the situation has become worse, that there is greater poverty and repression today. "It thus rules out manipulation, such as that attempted by some people during the preparation for the Puebla conference". These people tried to suggest that today the situation is "different". The final document also knows it is different but different primarily means worse. "The more total message of the plenary

sessions and the open statements to the press restored a tone of greater ecclesial reality to the Puebla conference... Reality struggled to get a hearing; and it succeeded in large measure despite many difficulties" (Sobrinho, *art. cit.* p. 302, 298).

Notwithstanding efforts to control reality, things happened. Though Baggio and Trujillo left nothing to chance, the unforeseen began to influence the thinking of the conference. The Pope's unprepared speeches which followed his opening speech at Puebla, which were full of humanity and passion for justice inspired by the sight of the masses of the poor thronging his route, added new tempo and challenge to the dreary task set to the Bishops within the Palafoxiano seminary walls. And outside the walls (cf Heb 13:12-13), met the progressive theologians and social scientists, some 40 of them. They decided to support the bishops inside the walls. They worked hard, analysed and commented on documents and drafts which progressive bishops brought to them. They produced position papers of their own. Their writings were soon circulating in the assembly and were being acknowledged. Yet no move was made on the part of the organisers to invite them inside. It is estimated that 25 per cent of the final document was written by these uninvited assistants (Sandoval, *art. cit.* p. 35-36).

McAfee Brown writes: "We discover from Puebla that if voices are excluded from official meetings, they can organise unofficially and can perhaps gain an even greater hearing than would otherwise have been possible... That some of the Bishops were open to the voices outside meant that there was, through them, at least some access from outside to inside... My own guess would be that most of what is good in the final document is the fruit of this intramural-extramural journey" (*art. cit.* 349).

"Truth is not made by a series of statements", explains Brown, much less is it made and served by manipulative tactics, vindictive use of power, or concern for institutional security which overlooks the people. Truth ultimately is God's people, humankind, the world he loved so much as to give his Son for it. "Only those statements will have ongoing significance that



can be read in the presence of the poorest of the poor and enable all who hear them to begin in a new way to see the world through the eyes of the poor and make a preferential option to side with them" (McAfee Brown, art. cit. p. 332).

In an open letter sent to the Bishops' meeting in Puebla, a group of Gautemalan peasants said:

"What is most painful for us, Bishops, is that many workers adjust to the situation because of their understanding of religion. They say that the way things are is good because it is "the will of God". And they keep silent. The system of injustice and oppression is also the fault of bishops who from way back in the past have not conscientized us. In religious matters, we have not always been told the truth. But one day we will have to know the truth: "Woe to those of you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep (Luke 6:25). For the people will rise up because they will not tolerate this misery any longer, because they will become conscious of their wounds, of their nails, of their cross.

Some priests and bishops have contributed to undoing the blindfold in our eyes and to opening our ears. But not all the religious leaders work in the same way. The majority still side with the rich and the exploiters... (The Bishops) do not venture to denounce anything of the injustices, or worse, when we hear their homilies over the radio, we realize they are covering up the injustices. There are priests who preach the Gospel to blindfold our eyes, not to open them. But to these bishops and priests who do not want to tell the truth about the life of Christ, woe to them..." (A Group of Gautemalan Peasants, "An Open letter to the Bishops meeting in Puebla", *IDOC*, op. cit. p. 210-211).

"... not always been told the truth... the blindfold in our eyes... covering up the injustices... preach the Gospel to blindfold our eyes..." To evangelize! So they have had experience of it. They, these peasants, have done their christian duty in denouncing it.

*Satyagraha*, clinging to the Truth with hands and heart is the basis for evangelization. *asato ma sad gamaya* is the evangelizer's prayer. Our prayer is for liberation from all tastes and tendencies to manipulate human beings, their truth and the truth of their sufferings, to manipulate God and his Gospel; for liberation from all religious and ecclesiastical and political traditions of manipulation. May God's truth come when and as it wills, on all the winds of God and with all God's surprises. And may we be completely open.

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# Ecumenism and Freedom

Ecumenism may mean the theory and practice relating either to the unity of the churches or to the unity of all mankind. In this paper the stress will be on ecumenism in the broader sense, since in my view, the unity of the churches assumes meaning only in relation to the unity of mankind as a whole. As I shall show in what follows, commitment to the unity-in-freedom of all men is an essential pre-requisite for unity among Christians. The perspective adopted here is also dictated by the specificity of the Indian situation. Though the search for a universal humanity is found in all cultures and among all peoples, its urgency is experienced all the more intensely in India where we are confronted with a vast humanity, fragmented on the basis of caste, colour, and religion. The problem for us is to create a climate of solidarity in which people of different communities recognize their oneness as members of the family of man, while respecting each other's differences, and address themselves to the common task of creating a new social order based on justice and mutual concern.

## Types of Ecumenism

It is generally believed that ecumenism is something good in itself. This needs to be called in question. Whether it is good or bad would depend on the goal in view and on the strategy adopted for realizing it. Seen from this angle, one may distinguish two types of ecumenism - ecumenism of domination and ecumenism of freedom. By ecumenism of domination I understand every attempt by a human group - caste, community or race - to impose on others its own particular vision and way of life as valid for all. Domination may be exercised by use of force or by means of economic and religious sanctions. Where the attempt fails to eliminate all opposition it may resort to the strategy of co-operation i.e. of integrating the dissenting view into the dominant culture by according it a subordinate place. Where even that strategy proves futile, efforts will be

made to marginate the dissenters. In any case, the aim is to create the universal under conditions chosen by the ruling classes. In so far this kind of ecumenism denies those outside the right to maintain their otherness, it is but a form of totalitarianism.

The ecumenism of freedom, on the other hand, seeks to create a universal community in which the different races, castes, cultures, and religions will be able to develop each according to its own specific genius and tradition while at the same time enriching and being enriched by one another. What it envisions is a union that diversifies and a diversity that unites. It stands for the oneness of all achieved through the 'otherness' of each. The freedom it promises to individuals and groups will consist in their being recognized by the community as absolute values, in other words, it will be a freedom born of justice and love.

It goes without saying that, of the two types of ecumenism, only the second is genuine. All ecumenism of domination is self-defeating. For, it has for its essential condition the division of the human community into rulers and the ruled. It is a search for unity on the basis of disunity. Besides, by its very nature it is conservative. Because, it is in the interest of the ruling classes to maintain and reinforce the conditions which have conferred on them the privilege of ruling. As such they will be opposed to any radical change in society and culture. The ecumenism of freedom, on the contrary, cannot accept the status quo of exploitation and domination. It has to overthrow the prevailing conditions in order to create a new society in which there will be neither exploiters nor exploited, neither rulers nor ruled. And this is because it has for its social agent those sections of the community in whose interest it is to do away with all conditions of domination.

Ecumenism as a historical force - whether of domination or freedom - operates both on the level of consciousness and social being, of theory and praxis. The ideas, values, and beliefs associated with it condition and are conditioned by the mode of production (economy) and by the system of decision making (political system). The interaction between the two levels admits of infinite variations depending on time and place, and are



to be empirically determined. In what follows the stress will be on religio-cultural ecumenism, while not altogether neglecting the economic and political dimensions.

## Ecumenism of Domination

### The Hindu oikoumene

The earliest attempt to establish an Indian oikoumene came from the Aryans who invaded India around 1500 B.C. (?). Thanks to their possession of cavalry which the original inhabitants lacked they were able to subjugate the latter and settle down in the northern regions of India. The original Dravidian population was reduced to the position of slaves condemned to render menial service to the conquerors. They in course of time formed the lowest caste (the Sudras) in the caste hierarchy. The racial hegemony of the Aryans is reflected in their religion as embodied in the Samhitas (collection of hymns to the gods), the Brahmanas (sacrificial texts) and the Upanishads (philosophical aphorisms and anecdotes). Religion served to legitimate and reinforce Aryan domination. It is significant that the chief of the Vedic pantheon, Indra, was invoked as 'the protector of the Aryan colour' and 'the destroyer of the dark skin' (i. e. of the Dravidians). The nascent theology, clothed in the language of myth, also provided religious sanction to the social supremacy of the Brahmins over the lower castes. For instance, the Purusha-sukta of the Rigveda narrates how the four castes emanated from the highest deity - the Brahmin from his mouth, the Kshatriya from his arms, the Vaisya from his loins, and the Sudra from his feet. The deity continued to fulfil his function as the guardian of the interests of dominant race and castes even in later times. In the Bhagavat-gita, for instance, Lord Krishna claims that he himself founded the caste system. The bias in favour of the upper castes may be seen also in the way (marga) of salvation propounded in the Upanishadic writings, which consisted in gnosis i. e. in the knowledge that one's deepest self (the Atman) is identical with the Absolute (Brahman). But in order to attain to this knowledge one had to study the Vedas, and, significantly, the study of the Vedas was forbidden to the lowest caste, the Sudras. These could attain

salvation only through the performance of menial service to the higher castes.

The attempt of the dominant castes to impose on others a social and cultural unity on terms suited to maintain their hegemony provoked a protest from the dominated castes and tribes, a protest spearheaded by Jainism and Buddhism around the 6th century B. C. Out of the struggle between Vedic religion and these heterodox religions there arose the Hinduism of today. The emergent Hindu orthodoxy continued the policy which Vedic religion had initiated of bringing about unity through domination. In this it was greatly helped by the patronage of the Hindu kings of the Gupta period (319-540 A. D.). The means it employed may be grouped under following heads: (i) Elimination by use of force. Orthodox Hinduism colluded with the rulers that were to wipe out the religions of the dominated classes. Buddhists and Jains were persecuted. Buddhist viharas were demolished and looted. There is some evidence to show that in the 6th century A. D. about eight thousand Tamil Jains were put to death by militant Hindus. (ii) Integration through co-optation. The social integration achieved through the caste system was reinforced by the co-optation of popular gods into the traditional pantheon. Krishna of popular religion was identified with Vishnu, and Siva with Rudra, of the Vedic pantheon. Just as the lower castes were made to serve the upper castes so, too, the gods of former were made servants of the higher gods. Thus Hanuman, the monkey, was made a servant of Rama (Vishnu); Nandi, the bull, became the beast of transportation for Rudra-Siva; the cobra, till then an independant object of popular worship, became Vishnu's bed. Similarly, the female deities of the subjugated matriarchal tribes were married to the male deities of the traditional pantheon. (iii) Religious legislation: The most powerful weapon orthodoxy fashioned to enslave the minds and hearts of the common man was the religious legal code according to Manu. It reaffirmed the sacred origin of the caste system, conferred economic and social privileges on the Brahmins, stabilized the system of ritual purity, thus degrading millions of people to the position of untouchables and outcastes. (iv) Marginalization: Such tribes and communities as refused to be integrated into Hindu society were relegated to a position inferior to that of even the lowest

castes and were socially and ritually discriminated against. Marginalization was itself a way of ensuring the all-inclusive unity of the social organism.

The search for a Hindu oikoumene based on institutionalized injustice and inequality reached a new stage of intensity with the advent of the colonizers. The latter greatly enhanced the power of the dominant castes by conferring absolute property rights on the landlords. With the connivance of kings, orthodox Hindus started Hinduizing the tribals all over India. Their attempt met with success in southern India, while the northern tribes by and large managed to maintain their cultural identity. Here it must be remembered that the policy of Hinduization was in part a response to Christian missions. It was dictated by the desire to prevent the low castes and the outcastes from joining the Christian fold, and in this the Hindus imitated the methods adopted by the missionaries. However, with the gaining of independence, and with the setting up of a secular state, militant Hinduization was all but given up. Nor was it so necessary. For the lower castes and the outcastes had so internalized the value-system of their masters that they began in many places assimilating the customs and habits of the latter as a means to gaining a higher social status. This process, which sociologists have called Sanskritization, has in recent years slowed down thanks to the Anti-Brahmin movements that emerged in different parts of the country.

Hindu militancy is still very much alive in contemporary India. The threat from the economic empire of Christian churches, the inroads made by capitalism on traditional society, the new forms of upward and downward social mobility induced by money economy, the secularization of economic and political life, and the penetration of Marxism into Hindu society: all this has put the majority community on the defensive. And this defensiveness has become a concerted offensive in the form of the militant organization called the R. S. S. (Rashtriya Swayam-sevak Samgh). Its members still nurse the hope of a theocratic Hindu nation which would marginate the followers of other religions into aliens.

**Christian ecumenism : an ideology of conquest ?**

Paradoxically Christianity which proclaims the equality of all came to India with its own project of domination. The advent of European Christianity on the Indian soil coincided with colonialism, which itself was largely determined by the requirements of mercantile and industrial capitalism. And imperialism is essentially an attempt at establishing a political *oikoumene* by means of the sword. It is not by accident that Christianity of the colonial period manifested tendencies which smack of cultural imperialism. True, it did not resort to the use of force either to take roots in India or to expand its fold. But it had developed a theology of ideological domination. Particularly relevant here is the theory and practice of conversion prevalent in the churches till recently. It had for its premise the belief that those outside the church have no salvation. It divided mankind into the spiritually privileged and disprivileged, and made a virtue out of ideological violence against the latter. Just as the colonial capitalist saw in the produce of India so much raw material to be transformed into finished products, just as the imperialist rulers saw in the native kings so many centres of power to be conquered, so, too, the churches looked upon the non-Christians as human raw materials to be converted into members of her own fold. Understandably, during this period it is the image of Christ the King that occupied the centre of Christian consciousness and piety. Dogma, cult, and religious law as they developed in the west were made normative not only for Christians but also for non-Christians if these wished to be saved. In short, Christianity entertained the dream of a unity of faith for the people of India according to patterns it imported from the west. In essence, therefore, what it envisaged differed little from the ecumenism of domination pursued by the dominant castes. Besides, the Christian pursuit of unity tended to reinforce colonial rule. Nehru was not entirely wrong when in his Autobiography he accused the Church of having "served the purposes of British imperialism and given capitalism and imperialism a Christian covering".

With the collapse of colonial rule a new relationship emerged between India and the industrialized countries of the west. No more was there overt economic exploitation or political



domination. But covert exploitation and domination continued whether through unjust trade relations or through international organizations like the United Nations. With this there came about a change in the attitude of Christianity to people of other religious persuasions. The theory and practice of conversion was all but abandoned. Christians reconciled themselves to the prospect of having to live with people of other religions for ages to come. However, this did not amount to a renunciation of the Christian *oikoumene*. For there arose a new theology which sought to achieve theologically what the policy of conversion would have achieved in practice, i.e. the christianization of the world. It 'baptized' all men and women of good will of other religions as 'anonymous Christians'. While it recognized that the followers of other faiths can be saved, it hastened to add that such salvation as was gained was due to the fact of the church existing as the sacrament of universal salvation. In tune with this development the image of Christ the King was replaced by that of the cosmic Christ presiding over the destiny of all nations and cultures. Christians could thus nurse the comfortable feeling that they are the nerve centre of an invisible spiritual empire encompassing the entire universe. They could maintain their privileged position while, at the same time, being a permanent minority. In reality this kind of Christian awareness and the theology corresponding to it is a manner of preemptively annexing the non-christian world to the Christian domain and, as such, is a form of covert ideological imperialism.

### Church unity: for what?

The period of competitive capitalism saw the various Christian denominations pitted against one another, each claiming to establish its own *oikoumene*. Under such conditions their unity could not have become a live issue. But since then competitive capitalism has given way to monopoly and multinational capitalism based on co-ordinated sharing of raw materials and markets. Similarly, on the political level the industrialized nations learned to work together in exploiting their own labour and that of the developing countries. I suggest that this has created a climate favourable to efforts towards church unity. No wonder the movement for Christian unity originated in the west and only

subsequently became an issue in India. How to evaluate this new development?

If the ecumenism of domination pursued by the individual church is something wrong, the unity of churches can only reinforce that wrong. A unified front of ideological aggression on the part of Christianity will be seen as a much greater threat by non-Christians who wish to maintain their own religious freedom and identity than the existence of churches at variance with one another. Furthermore, where the churches are in league with the exploiting classes their unity will render the necessary structural changes in society all the more difficult. This is particularly true of India where the church leadership on the whole tends to support whatever regime happens to be in power.

Certain conclusions follow from our discussions thus far: (i) All ecumenism of domination whether through force, co-optation or conversion denies the equality of all men as children of God and, as such, should be eschewed. (ii) Church unity within the framework of a theology of domination and of alignment with the ruling classes will only serve to accentuate the disunity and conflict already existing in society. (iii) There is, therefore, need to look for a new basis for the unity of the churches. What is that new basis? And what is the ecumenical practice it calls for?

## Ecumenism of Freedom

### The project of Jesus

The new basis we are looking for finds its clearest expression in Jesus' message of the reign of God. His concern was not founding a community with himself as its centre, but the realization of a universal humanity centred upon the God who comes and *becomes* in history. He looked forward to a new age of freedom in which the poor will possess the earth, in which justice and love will bind all men and women into an abiding communion, in which there will no more be guilt, sin, death, or sense of meaninglessness. In the age to come neither ideology nor power nor wealth will fragment the human community; not ideology, because man will have seen God and in

seeing Him discovered his true visage and that of his fellowmen; not power, because it will have given way to service; not wealth, because there will no more be exploitation of one class by another. Jesus spoke of it in symbolic language as a festal meal where people will come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Issac and Jacob i. e. as communion of nations, peoples and cultures.

Membership in the new humanity will be determined on the basis not of adherence to any set of dogmas, cultic practices or religious laws but of doing the will of God which for Jesus meant loving one's neighbour. It is significant that Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels never required faith in him as pre-requisite for belonging to the reign of God. What he enjoined on his audience was faith in God, faith as creative response to the divine presence in history. There is therefore nothing sectarian about his project of an *oikoumene* of freedom. That is why commitment to it can provide the new basis for the unity not only of the churches but also of the many religions and cultures. It is also in harmony with what is best in the Indian tradition as the following brief survey will show.

### **The Indian search for unity in freedom**

The Indian quest for unity founded on freedom and equality originated in the revolt of the down-trodden masses against the attempt of the dominant castes to impose unity on their own terms. Its earliest champion was the Buddha. He rejected the caste system and the Brahmin claim to superiority. He taught: "No Brahman is such by birth, no outcaste is such by birth. An outcaste is such by his deeds, a Brahman is such by his deeds". Just as Jesus of Nazareth would do six centuries later in Palastine, the Buddha defied all social taboos and ate from the hands of the social outcastes. He chose his disciples even from the lowest castes. He asked his followers to be their own lamps and not to depend on gods or priests for salvation. Nor would he have anything to do with the esoteric gnosis propounded by the Vedic seers. He taught the common man's way of reaching the supreme goal of life, the way of love and friendliness for all. In words that remind us of the Sermon on the Mount he told his disciples "By charity, goodness, restraint, and self-control man and woman alike store up a well-hidden treasure-

a treasure which cannot be given to others and which robbers cannot steal—that is the treasure which will not leave him”. The love he preached extended beyond the community of man and reached out to all living beings. As for the final goal of life, nirvana, he refused to define it; he would only describe it in negative terms as a state characterized by absence of acquisitiveness (alobha), absence of oppressiveness (adosha) and absence of deluding knowledge (amoha). In short, the Buddha projected an oikoumene of equality, love, and universal compassion. What he proclaimed was nothing short of a charter of freedom for the disinherited masses of India. No wonder that the new religion invited fierce repression from the guardians of orthodoxy and was eventually driven out of India, but not before leaving an indelible mark on the Indian mind.

The next significant thrust towards an oikoumene of freedom was the later Bhakti movement (12th century) which originated in Tamil Nadu, then spread to the other states of India. It arose at a time when the peasantry was heavily burdened by feudal taxation levied for the construction and maintenance of temples and palaces. It rejected caste system along with the supremacy of the Brahmins, and advocated the equality of all men and women. It criticized religious formalism and the worship of images. Instead it emphasized love for man and God and the practice of righteousness as the sure and only road to salvation. Through the Bhaktas, who came even from the lowest castes and the untouchables, the Buddha's message of universal love once again echoed and re-echoed in India. Unfortunately, lacking in leadership, organization and a unified vision, the movement succumbed to Hindu orthodoxy and was eventually integrated into it.

More tragic was the fate that befell the innumerable prophetic movements that arose among the tribals and the lowcastes throughout India in the 18th and 19th centuries. Some of these drew inspiration from the Christian message of the kingdom of God, while others drew upon tribal myths about the golden age to come. With few exceptions these protest movements were both religious and political and sought to create a new social order of equality and freedom. They were, however, ruthlessly suppressed and their leaders put to death by



the unholy alliance of Brahmins, local kings and the colonial rulers. Only such among them as confined themselves to cultural action could survive and have a lasting impact on society. Here mention must be made of the movement started by Sri Narayana Guru in Kerala for the uplift of Ezhavas (outcastes) with his slogan of 'one caste, one religion, one God', the Dravidian movement in South India, and the neo-Buddhist movement in Maharashtra.

This cursory survey is enough to show that when we as disciples of Jesus engage ourselves in the task of realizing his dream of a universal humanity we are not introducing an alien element into our culture; rather, we are only being true to what is most authentic in the Indian tradition.

## Perspectives on Ecumenical Praxis

### Conversion unto God

To begin with, let me state first in what ecumenical praxis does not consist. It does not consist in merely carrying on dialogue at the theoretical level between theologians of different religions. Such dialogue can only have marginal value so long as the deeper causes of conflict are not eliminated. Nor can an oikoumene of freedom be established through the conversion of all men to any one faith, whether Christian, Hindu or Muslim. For, all peoples have the right to maintain each the specificity of its own experience of God. What genuine ecumenism demands is the conversion of all religions and peoples *to God*, to the God who confronts man in history with His unconditional demands. Conversion in this sense does not presuppose the superiority of any culture over other cultures, of any religion over other religions, since all men of all religions and cultures stand in need of being inwardly purified and transformed by the spirit of God that renews the face of the earth. What superiority any religion may have must be measured in terms of its capacity to change the world in response to the ever new divine challenges. Further, the conversion unto God we are advocating will not level down all differences nor impose a sterile uniformity on all. What it will achieve is unity in diversity: unity, because it is the same Spirit that takes hold of all men: diversity, because both the divine challenge and the human response will be clothed in different religio-cultural traditions.

### Unity through struggle

Conversion unto God means further that we let ourselves be taken hold of by his Spirit so that in the strength of the same Spirit we preach good news to the poor, release to captives, and recovery of sight to the (physically and ideologically) blind.

For us in India this means carrying on a relentless struggle against exploitation by landlords, by the national bourgeoisie and by transnational capitalism; and work for a new economic order in which people as a whole will control the conditions of production, distribution and consumption. Only thus can the conflict between the rich and the poor, between the employer and the employee, between the producer and the consumer, and between the city and countryside be resolved. On the political plane the struggle will have to be against the ruling classes who control the levers of power at all levels of political organization, so that the dichotomy between the rulers and the ruled and between the bureaucracy and the people will progressively be eliminated. Equally important is the need to fight the divisive forces operating in the domain of ideas and values such as the value system of capitalism, the prevalent theologies of legitimation, and, above all, the on-going cultural invasion from the west. There is no other way to overcome the conflict between the elite and the people, and between the teachers and the taught. The disprivileged must regain their freedom to think their own thoughts, to dream their own dreams, and to pursue their own goals.

### **The agent of ecumenical praxis**

The primary initiator of the ecumenism of freedom cannot be any closed community professing any one faith. The means must conform to the end. The all-inclusiveness of the new humanity envisioned must be reflected in the local communities of struggle. These must consist of men and women of different religions and cultural traditions but united on the common basis of overcoming all social and cultural antagonisms. Their social base will be the dispossessed classes, though they will also include such individuals from the other classes as are conscious of the exploitative and alienating character of the existing society. It is encouraging to note that such truly ecumenical communities are springing up in different parts of India. They need to be linked up with similar groups in other parts of the world so that a broad international front is created for global collective action.

### **Consequences for the churches**

The participation of Christians in the struggle for unity will have profound repercussions on their belief and practice. Let me enumerate some of them:

(i) A new theology will emerge which focuses not on tradition but on God encountered in history. In so far as this encounter involves both the divine challenge and the human res-

ponse theology will become the articulation of ecumenical praxis. (ii) Since the divine challenge in any one country will be the same for all its people theological reflection carried on in the context of different religio-cultural traditions will tend to converge. (iii) The new theology will recapture the original perspective of Jesus centred upon the reign of God. Theology will thus rejoin prophecy to become a world-transforming force. Purely academic, conceptual theology will be left behind once and for all. (iv) The dominant image that will shape the specifically Christian consciousness will be neither Christ the King nor the Cosmic Christ but Jesus, Prophet and Servant of Jahweh. (v) In the measure in which Christians creatively respond to the ever new challenges of the living God they will realize that He cannot be housed in dead concepts inherited from the past. The new wine will burst the old wineskins of dogma, cult and law. With that an important barrier that separates the various Christian denominations will have fallen to the ground. (vi) The community into which Christians will have to insert themselves in order to work for the oikoumene of freedom will be modelled not after the parish but after the table fellowship of Jesus with social outcasts i. e. it will be a community open to all - whether Hindus, Muslims or Marxists - who are open to the new humanity of freedom. (vii) Finally, as popular struggles for the socialization of wealth gathers momentum the churches will be forced to sever their links with the ruling classes and once again become capable of the divine option in favour of the poor. Similarly, the demand for people's control over all levels of decision making will initiate a process within the churches towards greater decentralization and democratization. Freed from conflicting economic and political vested interests, the churches will find it easier to achieve unity.

*Note:* This paper was written in a hurry, and the author could not incorporate detailed references. However, for the underlying interpretation of the message of Jesus see his JESUS AND FREEDOM, Orbis Books, New York. On the Indian tradition the following books may be consulted.

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|---------------------|--|
| D. D. Kosambi       | - CULTURE AND CIVILIZATION OF ANCIENT INDIA, 1977, DELHI |
| „                   | MYTH AND REALITY, 1962, BOMBAY                           |
| Stephen Fuchs       | - REBELLIOUS PROPHETS, 1965, BOMBAY                      |
| Wm. Theodore deBary | - SOURCES OF INDIAN TRADITION, 1963, DELHI.              |

# BULLETIN 1

## EVANGELIZATION : A LETTER AND SOME COMMENTS

One of the latest Indian documents on evangelization is a letter from Jesuit provincials to Jesuit missionaries. It is the outcome of a meeting of the Provincials with their General last January in Hyderabad. It is published here with comments because it raises several questions which need discussion. Given below are 30 out of the 31 paragraphs of the letter; the introduction is omitted. The numbering of paragraphs is an addition by the editors. Comments follow the text of the letter.

### A. Text of the letter

#### Scope of evangelization

2 Evangelization was the theme of the meeting. We were aware that evangelization covers a very broad field in fact, in the words of *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, it aims at the renewal of the whole of mankind by bringing the Good News into all strata of humanity transforming it from within and making it new (EN 18).

3 In our meeting, however, we restricted ourselves to the field to which *you* have been 'sent' by the Society with the specific mission of preaching the Gospel to set up and foster new christian communities (32 GC 73), destined to be signs of God's liberating Word.

#### Reasons for this theme

4 The task of evangelization by direct preaching of Jesus Christ remains essential today and must be continued more than ever before (GC 73). This directive of the General Congregation - echoing recent Church documents - the Provincials wanted to make their own thereby committing themselves anew to a work



which has ever been and remains a privileged expression of our commitment to the service of faith. This was the main reason which moved us to spend time in prayer and reflection.

5 There was yet another factor. In the efforts at renewal over the last decade, and even more so after 32 GC, an impression may have been created that priorities in the Society have totally changed. The Post-Vatican II theology of salvation, we know, has disturbed some among you. Younger men are said - we do not hold this view - to be less committed to evangelization by direct preaching. So much emphasis is placed today on the promotion of justice, adult education, involvement in people's movements that the missionary sometimes feels relegated to a second class apostolate. We wanted to state unambiguously the importance and relevance of your apostolate.

6 The Provincials in their meeting considered the basic attitudes required of the evangelizer today, they discussed approaches and methodologies, the challenge thrown at us in the call to promotion of justice, now more than ever an integral dimension of our service of faith. Practical administrative policies for a better service to local churches were discussed. Finally certain decisions were taken to update the formation of the evangelizer and the necessary structures of implementation and support.

### Basic perspectives of evangelization

7 As in all other apostolates, so too in the field of evangelization there is need of constant reflection over the work we do. We must first humbly acknowledge that we are but a handful, that we do not possess the key to every problem, that evangelization is eminently God's work and that God's plan and pace are inscrutable to us.

8 But this should all the more spur us into questioning ourselves on the basic perspectives which should guide planning and implementation of diocesan and province policies.

9 We stand for: *mission* above maintenance; *witnessing* to the coming of the kingdom, of which the Church is the external sign, and *proclaiming* its values of freedom, fellowship and

justice, rather than setting out on a conquest; *seeing ourselves as servants* of the kingdom rather than dispensers of light to those in a situation of sin and darkness; *inserting* our proclamation into the context of the Indian reality; its cultures, its living faiths and its widespread poverty and injustice, rather than imposing a way of life alien to the needs and aspirations of the Indian people.

### Attitudes and orientations

10 And so we realize that the first in need of being evangelized are we ourselves. Deep within us we know we can never really do without:

11 *A deep experience of God*, born out of daily contacts with him in prayer, an experience which urges us to share it with our fellow men.

The content of our prayer, both personal and communitarian, ought to relate to the *real* needs (spiritual and material) of the people and of the country. The mission team itself (priests, brothers, sisters, and catechists) should grow as a praying community of believers. The liturgy (Eucharist, Sacraments, etc.) should be celebrated as an *event* and, in the measure approved by the local Bishop, using the idioms and symbols through which the people express their deepest aspirations.

12 *An Emptying of self* (Phil 2:7) which allows Christ to take possession of us, and warns us against the temptations of paternalism, desire for power and security and the mirage of immediate or merely quantitative results.

It is necessary to question ourselves again and again on the entry point of our missionary activity: on this depends the quality of the new convert and the evangelizing thrust that each christian community can take in its turn: is it an answer to a spiritual quest, to a desire for overall human development, or merely the result of our routine educational, developmental, and caritative activities? A criterion may well be the measure of time we daily spend *with* the people and their deeper needs, and that given to administration of parish activities, tasks which often could be more efficiently handled by others.

Our mission residences ought to be 'open houses', ashrams where spiritual help and comfort is always readily available. It would not be correct if the image which our centres project is only one of intense activity, bee-hives of developmental projects and relief. Socio-economic development has a place in the life of the christian community. But here too, many now question themselves on the aim, the methodology and the actual result of such activity. Considering the complexity of the socio-economic structure in which we work, it is important to evaluate regularly what we do, and see to what extent specific projects actually benefit the poor, or whether the end result goes to the better-offs, the christian community only, or the mission centre itself.

14 It is of the nature of *mission* to constantly search for newer ways to allow Gospel seeds to flower into ever new forms of commitments. The contemplative touch of the ashram, so deeply rooted in the Indian tradition, may not have been sufficiently made available to the people of India. The way of the sannyasi, to whom people flock for spiritual guidance, the adoption of bhajans and kirtans as a catechesis adapted to the genius of village folk, a radical insertion into a village community and its life-style dissociated from the support of a large institutional set-up, all these are ways adopted by some missionaries and which deserve attention and support. The enquiry centre, for a more sophisticated audience, allows the educated to get acquainted with the Gospel, free from any inducement or external pressure. Conscientization of village communities englobing faith-that-does-justice is a more recent form of Gospel proclamation, of which mention is made again later in this letter.

15 Provincials have agreed to foster new approaches in missionary methods, more radically evangelical in detachment and insertion into the daily lives of the people and their needs.

16 *A profound respect for the genuine values and cultures of the people in continuation of God's plan of Incarnation (GC 103); a respect which expresses itself in a deep love for people, a love which is patient and detached, which guides rather than dictates, understands rather than judges.*

As it is, conversion too often amounts to passing over from one socio-cultural group to another with consequent isolation and alienation. As a result mission work takes on a political colour, is branded as communal aggression. This problem is not new. Efforts in the past in India tell us of the many who have pioneered and paved a way. Names like De Nobili, Beschi, Stephen stand as landmarks. They indicate that this complex problem must be tackled by men in the field, even more than by theoretical experts. The solution *will* be found in *praxis*. We cannot but commend and give full support to those who today in several regions in India school themselves in the religious and cultural aspirations of the people, in order to help them to express anew Christ's message.

- 17 *The Spirit of the Beatitudes* which fills us with a deep love for the kingdom and those to whom the kingdom is given: the poor, the humble, the pure in heart, those persecuted because they do what God requires (Mt. 5:3-10); a spirit which spurs us to a preferential option for the poor and the oppressed because they are the *anawim* of today.

In particular, the justice dimension in the proclamation of the Gospel ought to be a matter of special concern. Praise-worthy initiatives are taken in several parts of India, but we must acknowledge that there is still a long way to go to 'interiorize' the message of the Congregation and move on 'totally' and 'corporately' (GC 53) to a genuine witnessing to faith and justice.

- 18 Till recently the christian response has been largely institutional, in the form of services rendered through large establishments, which themselves are part of a particular socio-economic-political system. Neither has the social legislation over the last thirty years been of much help to the larger section of the people. Today, a major element of solution seems to emerge in the efforts at conscientizing the masses, and at training and animating local leadership at grassroots. The process involves a change in self-image, awareness of one's dignity, of power in unity. Results obtained in several centres in India reveal the 'humanization' aspect of the method, and therefore its Gospel dimension.



19 We could ask ourselves: which efforts and initiatives are taken in mission centres to introduce the justice dimension in the concern and works of the centre? Our catechesis (religious formation, liturgy, prayer) ought to include education to respect of human dignity and concern for the rights of others.

20 A bold approach to issues of justice often brings in its wake conflict situations. These should not deter us from moving ahead. But we must learn from such new experiences. The Provincials feel the need of formulating certain guidelines, in consultation with men in the field, which would help them offer at this juncture the leadership required.

21 *Willingness to work with others*, Christians, men of other faiths and all people of good will; willing to play a subordinate, anonymous role (GC 39).

For instance, the catechist plays such an important role in the formation of new christian communities and in their growth to adulthood. His influence will be in proportion to the ongoing training given him and the status he holds in [the mission team: a trusted collaborator or a paid employee. In too many instances and on too many issues still, we hold the key and the answer to problems related to the community we serve. It is imperative that increasingly responsibilities be laid on the laity, keeping to ourselves tasks that are more directly of a priestly character.

22 *And last but not least, a joyful acceptance of the Mission*: the Jesuit evangelizer is 'sent' by the Church through the Society to proclaim 'the Good News about Jesus Christ' (Mk 1:1), and he does so in the first place through the testimony of his own life.

There are in India large areas where the presence of the Church is well nigh non-existent, or where personnel is insufficient. Barring two or three Jesuit provinces, such areas exist in nearly every diocese where the Society works. In India several States are not included in Jesuit provinces while requests have been received from Bishops in these regions for specific works. This is chiefly the case of North-West India. Aspects of these questions have been considered and it was decided that the

Provincial of India should initiate adequate responses, within resources available, to calls from Bishops in dioceses of the North, leading eventually to the formation of a regional unit covering the North and North - West.

23 Yet our answer to calls and needs should not just be in regard to geographical areas: our vision and commitment ought to be primarily people-oriented and move to 'responsive' groups. Tribals have traditionally been responsive to the values of the Gospel, so too certain caste groups. Another category that we may tend to bypass is the youth of India, especially college and university students. Their aspirations may not necessarily move them to commit themselves explicitly to Christ and the Church, but as a group their vision and aspirations are often akin to the Gospel values of generosity and selfless dedication, especially on issues involving the rights of the poor and the oppressed. To them we owe special attention.

24 The horizon should not be limited to India's own boundaries. Some 60 Jesuits work in foreign lands, of whom 25 in Nepal. These are a handful compared to the 3,000 Jesuits of the Assistency. Is the international dimension of the Society 'alive' among us in India? A greater readiness to answer needs beyond our own frontiers will be a challenge and a reminder that 'availability' is an essential trait of the Society.

25 The work we do in mission centres gives us the opportunity of working in close collaboration with the Bishops and the diocesan clergy. Our specific mission, however, calls for the establishment and the strengthening of the local clergy, where this does not obtain, and gradual withdrawal where church personnel is in sufficient number, so that we can be made available for other regions or newer forms of apostolate. Creation of favourable conditions for such withdrawal is as much the responsibility of individual missionaries as that of Superiors.

### **Formation of the evangelizer**

26 The formation of the evangelizer also drew the attention of the Provincials. Insistence was on selection and training of competent personnel. Recent studies in anthropology, the social sciences, psychology, new theological insights born out of a

closer identity with the material and religious aspirations of the millions that make India exercise a deep influence on how to approach the mission of evangelization in the India of today. It is necessary that the worker in the field constantly updates himself to answer ever new challenges.

27 The responsibility for programmes of on-going formation has been accepted by the respective 'Regional Chairmen of the Provincials' Conference (N-E, South and West). Concretely, the North-East proposes to make a start with a six-week programme of renewal for missionaries, priests and brothers.

28 It is proposed to strengthen the pastoral formation of the young Jesuits in the course of their theological training: a six-month guided pastoral programme will be launched from next academic year. Finally we have accepted to establish a secretariat which would function as a structure of support to the men in the field of direct evangelization and provide for exchange of ideas and experience in view of a renewal of the apostolate.

## Conclusion

29 It is not our intention to offer an exhaustive survey of our mission work in India. The thoughts suggested in this letter are meant primarily as a token of our great appreciation of and support for your work. We welcome your reactions and invite you to a dialogue.

30 We have addressed ourselves in the first place to you, men in the field. But we wish to include our younger men as well. To them we offer the challenge of this specific apostolate, in the best of the Society's tradition, an apostolate, which we know, calls for great sacrifice and detachment, but demands no less enthusiasm and creativity. We encourage them to embrace this form of apostolate in greater numbers and thus we wish to foster all forms of contacts between experienced missionaries and the younger men in the Society through informal meetings or sharing of experiences. We are all learners in the Lord's vineyard, and the measure of our companionship in Jesus will be gauged by our readiness to listen to and learn from one another.

31 Finally, let us remember that the work of evangelization is not the private enclave of a specific group. The proclamation of the Good News is embedded in every mission given to every Jesuit in whatever position or status. 'The call to the apostolate is one, though shared in manifold ways. . . . each member contributing to the common task of continuing Christ's saving work in the world, which is to reconcile men to God and men among themselves, so that by the gift of his love and grace they may build a peace based on justice.' (32 GC 31)

New Delhi

Ambrose D'Mello

## B. Comments

"There is a praiseworthy shift of emphasis from preaching the Gospel in view of baptism to presenting Christ as 'answer to a spiritual quest'; from social service to the work of liberation; and from cultural domination to 'inculturation'. This letter could give a new vision of the missionary presence of the Church in India. But as many such letters and documents, this also speaks of everything about the mission: there is a tendency to present a well-rounded, well-integrated, concept of the mission, touching all possible topics. The main thrust is lacking. How can Jesus Christ be in today's India the real answer to the millions? What is the liberation that he offers and how can we realistically work at it? These are the real issues. Unless such issues are taken up seriously and pursued courageously, this paper, as is the case with many such 'beautiful' papers, will slide into the files of the missionary and the status quo will continue" (S. Painadath).

### 2. Scope of evangelization, para 2 and 3:

(a) A merit of the letter is its attempt to make the idea of evangelization historical and concrete, and to restrict the discussion to the actual field of the missionaries' involvement.

(b) The description of mission as "preaching the Gospel to set up and foster new christian communities destined to be signs of God's liberating Word" is refreshing and hopeful. It goes beyond traditional ideas of baptizing individuals and placing them on the road to salvation understood as grace of God now and vision



of God after death. Attention is centred on the formation of communities and on the liberation which God's Word brings. There is a relation between the two: the communities are signs of the liberating Word, and therefore of liberation; they will be liberated and free communities. (c) The sphere of the liberating Word is probably not restricted to christian communities, but is understood as being co-terminous with human history. The christian communities (in the plural, significantly) are signs (in the plural) of the larger reality of human liberation which God has been and is accomplishing in and for history by his "Word". (d) At the same time the description poses challenges. What sort of "preaching" will set up the kind of sign-community described here? A sign in history of liberation has to contain or embody something of that liberation already now; it has to make the liberation historical, at least incipiently. Historical liberation has to do with people's historical life, work, sufferings, hopes and struggles. That is, it has to do with economic and political realities. We trust, then, that "preaching" here is not understood as an exercise in verbalism, but as action for the transformation of society so that a qualitatively new social reality or sign-community of freedom can come to birth. (e) That raises the question, where do we have such communities now? If some 2000 years of "preaching" has not produced some such challenging sign-communities, it is clear that a different kind of "preaching" is called for. (f) What does "new" mean? Is it a numerical addition to existing 'christian' communities? or does it refer to a new quality and life-style, and new relationships and structures?

### 3. Reasons for this theme, para 4-6:

(a) This section speaks of the importance of "evangelization by direct preaching"; and calls those engaged in it 'missionaries' as against those working for promotion of justice, for adult education, or for people's movements. This is hardly fair. (b) Evangelization by direct preaching is later (no. 27) called "direct evangelization". This vocabulary revives a distinction which we thought had been overcome since the days of the Nagapur consultation and the writings of D. S. Amalorpavadass and others. (c) The text however is happily inconsistent. Soon it will be telling the men in the field of direct preaching or

direct evangelization about justice as an integral dimension of our service of faith (6), of conscientisation as a more recent form of Gospel proclamation (14) and of humanisation as related to the Gospel (18). And finally (in 31) the dichotomy is overcome by the assertion that the proclamation of the Good News "is embedded in every mission given".

#### 4. Basic perspectives of evangelization, para 7-9:

(a) There are two negative factors: one is "that we do not possess the key to every problem", a realistic confession which relativises both mission and church and their competences and authorities. The other factor is the consequent need to question and criticise ourselves and the empires we tend to build in the name of the Gospel of Jesus. (b) Positively five realities are indicated for which we stand. The first, "mission above maintenance", reads like a cliché or the title of some book, and is unclear. The rest of para 9 is fine. Mission and evangelization are understood in terms of witnessing to the coming Kingdom and proclaiming its values of freedom, fellowship and justice. Once again the ideas of conquest and empire building are rejected. The traditions of Julius Caesar which have infected some churches and missions for long are firmly set aside. Missions organised and subsidised by imperialist powers and framed within colonial domination of peoples could hardly announce freedom and justice or denounce the violation of millions of human beings without risking their own existence. Few missions took the risk and laid down their life for God's people. (c) Only such churches as stood for justice and defended the dignity and freedom of the people have been signs of God's kingdom and liberating Word. It is not that the churches *are* this sign, but are called to be. (d) Refusing the role of dispensers of light to those sitting in darkness and sin amounts to sailing clear of colonial presuppositions and errors which reduced God to a tribal chief and to an old guy who had forgotten to care for men and women he had created and left on other continents than Europe, and which reserved light and holiness to baptized conquerors, captains, pirates, slave traders and gold-grabbers. The implicit confession is that the Kingdom comes to be where justice, fellowship and freedom are fostered or fought for. The mission is to recognize it and offer it a community in which it can reveal itself and become a force for

further social transformation and humanisation of the world. (e) Three important aspects of the Indian reality are mentioned as constituting the context which will determine the concrete meaning of the proclamation. These are India's cultures, living faiths and widespread poverty and injustice. Here is an invitation to the "missionary" who "feels relegated to a second class apostolate" because of emphasis on justice and people's movements (5), to look deeper into his faith and his message and discover their human and historical exigencies.

### 5. Attitudes and orientations, para 10-25:

(a) The first requirement is that we ourselves be evangelized and have a deep experience of God (10). Do we start with the experience of "God" or with the experience of the reality of people's life? Is it not through and in this reality that the divine, the transcendent horizon of meaning begins to shine and gradually take hold of us with growing clarity and assurance? Does "God" or the experience of "God" have content and meaning independently of people's united struggle for freedom, justice and dignity and authentic humanity in full communion and fellowship? (b) A historical experience of God is probably the mind of the letter since the letter proceeds to insist that prayer in its content should be communitarian as well as personal, that it should relate to the real needs of the people and of the country and not be something abstract and in the air, and that liturgy should be an event using the idioms and symbols of the people. (c) But then this commitment to history is practically withdrawn when a socially vital and creative part of it is made subject to the approval of the local Bishop. When people have faith and want to express it they themselves are the ultimate competent authority to decide upon the right and apt idioms, symbols and movements. They are often better equipped than clerics since they are culturally and spiritually less alienated and romanised, and less threatened by possible consequences if decisions made are not to the liking of those who control (needed?) funds. (d) The warning (in para 12) against temptations to paternalism and power, or immediate results or merely quantitative results must be heeded since these temptations are very real. (e) We take note of the letter's emphasis on insertion into 'the daily lives of the people and their needs'. The insistence is in order that our entry point should be the peoples



quest and needs, and not our theological *a priori* nor our practical need for security or job or satisfaction for our activism or our passivism. According to the letter a criterion for the right approach would be the measure of time we spend *with* the people and their deeper (real?) needs as against the time given to administration. But of course the question is, With what class of people and with what "deep" needs? For we do spend a lot of time and resources with and on the privileged classes: and tend to forget that food and recognition are two deepest needs, for they sustain life in its basic sense at its very foundations.

(f) It is refreshing to see the work of conscientizing the masses and village communities recognized as a valid form of Gospel proclamation, as the communication of a faith-that-does-justice which is the only authentic faith (14,18). And yet that can hardly be described as direct preaching of Jesus Christ or as direct evangelization. We begin to realize that evangelization is a much more complex and profound activity than mere verbal announcements. (g) The call for a regular evaluation of development projects and their aims and results is well taken (13). The position is that within existing structures, projects do not benefit the needy for their liberation and uplift, and therefore their relation to the Gospel is nil or negative. Work for change of structures and more egalitarian relationships will come within the range of evangelizing activity. (h) But the letter fails to call for a similar evaluation and criticism of ashrams and their 'contemplative touch', and the way of the sannyasi, and the social function of bhajans and kirtans, as well as the class character of all these. This remark is not to be taken as a word against ashrams, kirtans and contemplation. It is rather a plea against uncritical serving of old wine and a plea for exploring the different kind of bhajan and contemplation called for by the logic of the Gospel of Jesus and its incarnate faith and love committed to struggle unto death for the sake of the brothers and their earth. There is an authentic contemplation which is interior and inherent to all human existence, especially to the creative existence of the classes which work and struggle in hope.

(i) Para 16 touches on an old, difficult and delicate problem: that of conversion and church membership versus social



division and cultural alienation. While the appeal made to praxis and to men in the field for solution of the problem is valid, the dissociation of praxis from theoretical and critical reflection is regrettable. The reference made to men of long ago is not particularly helpful. The economic and political situation of De Nobili and others were different from ours; they never thought of culture in the way we think of it; they had little understanding of culture as bound up with modes of production and appropriation of surplus value. They stood in a colonial context and opted for the culture of the dominant group which was not what Jesus did and is not what we want. Their search was to clothe in upper class Indian garb the thoughts and institutions of the west imported and kept intact. Our search is different. (j) The regret that mission takes on a political colour and the suggestion that this could and should be avoided by 'men in the field' is unrealistic and is part of ecclesiastical ambiguity. In the history of the Christian movement it is hard to find a moment when the movement was both alive and apolitical. Equally true is this of church-institution. Its leadership sometimes dissuades us from politics and sometimes persuades us into it, while they are themselves in it all the time. No mission can be apolitical if it relates to the needs of the people and the country (11), if it is inserted into the daily lives of the people (15), if it seeks to answer the people's desire for overall human development (12), and if in fact our men are 'in the field' with the people (16, 12). The real question is not whether or how we can be apolitical, but what kind of politics we shall enter and for whom. (k) Exploring ways of avoiding the "communal aggression" referred to may lead us to call in question the entire structure and conception of the parish, and the separation in which the existing 'christian communities' have their base.

(1) Paras 17-20, titled the Spirit of the Beatitudes, constitute perhaps the finest passage in the letter, though some more clarity could be desired and the question could be posed if inter-human justice is only one dimension of the Gospel or *is* the Gospel. Could the oppressed overhear a Gospel which is not essentially and necessarily the news and hope of justice? Could the Good News of God and his love come to the deprived and hungry masses except as the right to work and right for the fruit of work? Those disturbed by emphasis on justice,

so significantly absent in the colonial gospel, are once more urged to deeper explorations of the Gospel faith. (m) The paras voice a criticism that our commitment to faith-justice is still haphazard and fragmentary, not total and corporate. They voice a sharper criticism of our institutions, establishments and their services: these are "part of a particular socio-economic-political system" which has its own logic and laws and grind on despite legislation on paper, and can never benefit the vast masses of the people. The letter is saying in effect that these institutions (and our educational establishments are included) cannot serve the cause of justice, cannot therefore serve the case of the Gospel, cannot embody the spirit of the beatitudes. (n) The letter asks us to include in our catechesis religious formation, liturgy etc., "education to respect of human dignity and concern for the rights of others". Could this be done without calling in question the feudal ways, inbuilt paternalism and subtle oppression of the roman catholic system, the margination of the laity, the concentration of decision-making in the hands of the clergy, the discriminations against women, the suppression of people's liturgical creativity, the denial of their rights to shape their own church structures and laws as believers etc.? (o) A large issue is raised in para 21 though the illustrations given are minor. The question is whether we are ready to work with members of other churches and denominations in the work of evangelization, proclamation of the Gospel and the formation of christian communities destined to be signs of the Kingdom and of God's liberating Word? And whether we are committed and catholic enough to work with all people of good will, be they leftists, socialists, marxists, who have seriously opted for the oppressed and for the dynamism of history which the exploited class carry. (p) The human perspective and the Gospel basis of much that the letter has been saying so far is given up in paras 22-23 for the old idea of 'the presence of the church' which is historically associated with institutional power, alignment with dominant classes and separate identity and activity to the detriment often of fellowship, freedom and justice. A church-centred conception of the mission is inadequate and must not replace the Kingdom-centred conception of it given in the earlier part of the letter. One suspects that the church-centred idea of mission lies behind the references to 'responsive' groups and castes. The interests revealed here ill accord with the major thrust in the body of the letter and with the reasons given for the call to pay special attention to youth and to students.

#### 6. Formation of the evangelizer, para 26-28:

(a) This section on selection and training of competent personnel does not ask from where we should recruit and what

basic cultural competence is required if we are to be with the poor (12), to relate to people's real needs (11), to be inserted in their daily life (15) and to make a preferential option for the poor and the oppressed (17). It raises no questions about the custom of seeking recruits almost exclusively from among university students despite the earlier admission that our universities and other educational institutions are "part of a particular socio-economic-political system", having its own upper class value-set, interests, outlook and psychology as well as orientation to the west. No suggestion is ventured that working class youth, both rural and urban, could be challenged to the task of setting up communities of liberation, of promoting justice, freedom and fellowship, of conscientizing the masses and building up humanizing forces, and of disclosing the horizons of ultimate reference and meaning. No indication that the worker youth could train themselves in their own milieu without being remoulded in our classical seminaries into little bourgeois gentlemen with habits and tastes which alienate them from their people. (b) What is required is a revamping of the entire training from novitiate to theology in terms of the Gospel dynamics and of India's reality (needs, aspirations, cultures, injustices etc). rather than a six-month guided pastoral programme, which looks very much like patchwork on a three to four year non-pastoral theology. It is more than clear by now that western colonial theology is no use for India today. In these matters something more radical and innovative is called for.

As Painadath points out, the letter could have been better focussed and integrated. As it is, it looks like an attempt to balance the socially active with a word about contemplation and the contemplatives and purely spiritual Gospel people with a call to commitment to justice. Nevertheless the letter is weighted on the side of justice. Though addressed to men in the field of direct preaching, there is such an emphasis on justice, dignity, humanization and conscientization that it is possible to read the letter as a re-interpretation of what preaching really means in our concrete history.

Vidyajyoti  
Delhi

Samuel Rayan

## BULLETIN 2

### STATEMENT OF THE INDIAN THEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION AT THE CONCLUSION OF ITS ANNUAL MEETING ON SALVATION IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT

at Kristu Jyoti College, Bangalore

13th to 15th June, 1980

#### I. Introduction

1. We, members of the Indian Theological Association, gathered in assembly to reflect on understanding 'salvation' in the Indian context, examined various aspects and implications of the mystery of salvation.

2. Hope belongs to the very humanity of every human person. This hope for salvation or liberation is expressed by all religions and ideologies. They try to respond to the human urge that strives toward a more meaningful life for themselves and the world in which they live. What they look forward to - salvation, liberation - and what they desire to be saved or liberated from greatly differs from time to time, place to place, person to person and tradition to tradition. That is why it is difficult to answer the question: "What is salvation?" in the pluralistic Indian situation.

#### II. Different approaches to salvation

3. In different ways has God spoken to the human race his saving word and in different ways has man sought his salvation. Salvation itself cannot be univocally defined for the different traditions, but can only be phenomenologically described as the essential, non conceptual symbol of the nearing and final stage, the non-objectifiable and non-subjectifiable substance of faith, and has for that reason to be mythicized, demythologized and remythologized. In the Indian context it has to be understood against the background of the cosmological assumptions of time and space, the anthropological suppositions and especially what may be termed the christic insight of each tradition. Here the



Christian answer to salvation cannot be exclusively deduced from the Bible since its categories do not tally with the Indian context, and the Bible does not often actually address the same problems as ours; thus reading from the Bible may sometimes be merely reading into the Bible. Hence the Christian approach to salvation in India must start with a recognition of the genuine thirst for salvation present here, a real incarnation and involvement in India's material conditions, an intellectual sharing in the thoughts and aspirations of our fellow countrymen and a sincere identification with our cultural and religious values.

4. Thus we reflected on the Buddhist idea of salvation which presents itself as a liberation from suffering (*dukha*) engendered by desire; it was a response to a situation of social change and also a part of religious transcendence over all conditioned existence. One of the ideas of liberation in Hinduism arises from direct encounter with and experience of *śabda*, the eternal *Vac*, and one of its mystical traditions represented by the Kundalini yoga shows a way of salvation that endeavours to integrate the different strands of existence and reorient them back to their ultimate source. Even the contemporary popular literature of the regional languages of India like Malayalam reveal the common man's complex attitude toward life and its meaning expressed in symbols untouched by rational interpretation. The different religious traditions as well as the particular traditions within a certain religion provide sometimes an obstacle but more often an opportunity to understand the complex idea of salvation. The genuineness of the tradition must be determined not merely by the criteria of doctrinal consistency but more by the orthopraxis it lives.

5. We surveyed with deep anxiety the socio-economic and political situation of India, in which a large section of the people live in abject poverty and exploitation with the ever widening gap between rich and poor. We consider this a situation of sin, whether recognized or not, which the Church should repent and atone for. We also see how the situation has become more complex by the Asianization of revolutions and counter-revolutions inspired by ideologies like Marxism and revivalist religious movements. We are forced to ask whether the established structures of wealth, power and influence can be transformed, poverty removed and hope for integral salvation rekindled in the hearts of our countrymen.

### III. Christ and salvation

6. God manifested his will to make all human persons find their fulfilment, the fullness of life manifested in Jesus (cf.

Eph. 1:5-10) at the fullness of time He embodied the divine response to the thirst of humanity. He was God's Word through whom Sacred Scriptures try to express in human words all experiences of God.

#### IV. Salvation and mission

7. The mission of the Church is the continuation of the mission of Jesus Christ. This is described in the Gospel of St. Matthew as a mission of salvation (Mt. 1:21). It is also seen as the fulfilment of messianic hopes of Israel (Lk 1:32). The mission of the Church is realized by working for the salvation, which has been realized in the person of Jesus and at his death and resurrection. In her mission the Church has to free herself from sin and widen her vision of God, man and the world, freeing herself from the selfishness which often keeps her prisoner of the structures within which she operates, immersed in her own internal problems without being aware of the real salvific needs of the world. The Church can free herself from sin only by making the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men and women of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, her own joy and hope, grief and anguish. Next, she has to work towards the fulfilment of the messianic hopes of the peoples. This she will achieve by responding to the action of the Spirit acting in the hearts of men.

#### V. A common struggle

8. The Christian community should relate itself to the rest of the human community at all levels. This is a basic requirement because salvation is the destiny of all the nations of the world. This is not possible unless there is a perfect human relationship among men.

The Christian community should be able to take seriously the human reality under all its aspects: social, political, cultural, economic, religious etc. discovering in all these human manifestations, the working of the Spirit, struggling to form the perfect man (Rom. 8:22-23).

The Christian community should communicate with the rest of humanity, more in a spirit of sharing than with an attitude of instructing and converting.

In the Indian situation, this mission of salvation would amount to the entrance of the Christian community into the salvific experience of the people of this sub-continent. A life of identification with their religious aspirations would imply a



sharing of their religious experience; a life of identification with their socio-politico-economic situation would imply sharing of their agonizing struggle for liberation.

9. The Church in India has been trying to continue the mission of salvation without sufficient effort at incarnation. This is not being faithful to Christ. Hence it is urgent that the Church takes up as a priority a process of authentic identification with the people on all levels. Thus she responds to the Spirit of Christ acting within them and leading them to that fullness of life in which consists salvation.

## VI. Task of the theologian in India today

10. The discovery of the working of the Spirit in the human heart and in human history calls for the fulfilment of the prophetic role of the Church. The whole history of Israel bears witness to this. Also in India we need prophets if the mission of salvation has to be properly fulfilled. Although the whole Church has to exercise this prophetic mission, the theologians have a special role to play. They have, therefore, to be alert and watchful to all that is happening around them. Only with a deep sense of God within themselves can they discern the presence of God in these events. They must be able to give expression to their interpretations with courage and resoluteness.

## VII. Research

11. Perhaps the most important task of the theologian is to articulate the faith, making it credible to his contemporaries. This includes the systematic research not only into the source and nature of Revelation, but also into the history of its progressive understanding by the Christian community, its relevance and meaning for modern man, and, especially in India, the enriching insights of World Religions. In this research, truth with its twin ideals of orthodoxy and orthopraxis should be its sole criterion. Only by a thorough and critical knowledge of the religious riches of India's past and present can we integrate with them the present day Christian perspective and make our contribution to the integral salvation of our people.

12. Theologians should study particularly the present-day situation, especially of the youth, their problems and aspirations so that our people are enabled to encounter the Word of God in its revolutionary power. In this theological research the methods and insights of the other human sciences of life and behaviour like psychology, sociology, anthropology, economics and politics should be taken into account and properly integrated.

### VIII. Theologians and the community

13. The prophetic role of the theologian makes him belong deeply to the community of mission. Even though he may have to keep alive his critical spirit in the fulfilment of his role, he should nevertheless manifest his deep sense of belonging to the community, of which he is a member and with which he shares the mission. This implies that he should foster an attitude of openness to the rest of the community without sacrificing his specific role as the interpreter of history and human situation. Since he belongs to the community, he respects the Magisterium of the Church making readily available to it his professional resources as well as the fruits of his research, without, however neglecting his role as the one who makes her open up to new ways of looking at the reality of God's plan operating in the world. The theologian's complementarity with the hierarchy should not be understood merely in terms of conformity but as a force that acts from within in order to make the Church continue her pilgrimage through this world exploring the unknown and new areas of her mission.

### IX. Conclusion

14. In facing this theological task, we feel the Indian Church should honestly ask herself the following questions: What do her presence and apostolate in the midst of the Indian masses contribute to their integral vision of life and salvation? In what ways can it help to accelerate the process of liberating people from the present situation of frustration, poverty and exploitation? How can it motivate the people to take an active role not only in the achievement of their spiritual salvation but also in a radical transformation of the economic, cultural and social situation in order to bring it into conformity with the dignity of man? In what way can we draw inspiration from the deep insights of Indian religions like Hinduism, Islam and Buddhism, which are an enduring sign of man's striving for total liberation. We feel it the specific role of the theologians to challenge the conscience of the community to listen to the Spirit speaking to it through the concrete situation. This would make theologizing in India an on-going process of rendering the Mystery of Christ alive and ever more incarnate.

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